

CHRISTMAS TO CANDLEMAS IN A CATHOLIC HOME

BY HELEN MCLOUGHLIN

THE LITURGICAL PRESS
St. John's Abbey
Collegeville, Minnesota

Acknowledgments: To Florence Berger and the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Des Moines, Iowa, for recipes on pp. 22, 25, 26, 35 from "Cooking for Christ"; to the Gregorian Institute of America, Toledo, Ohio, for the hymns on pp. 18 and 37; to the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine for the English version of passages from the Bible; to McLaughlin and Reilly Company, Boston, for hymns on pp. 20 and 39; to Harcourt, Brace and Company for quotation from "The Christmas Book," by Rev. Francis Weiser, S.J.; photography by Daniel McManamy.

Nihil obstat: John Eidenschink, O.S.B., J.C.D., Censor deputatus.

Imprimi potest: + Baldwin Dworschak, O.S.B., D.D., Abbot of St. John's Abbey.

Imprimatur: + Peter W. Bartholome, D.D., Bishop of St. Cloud.

Copyright by The Order of St. Benedict, Inc., Collegeville,
Minnesota.

"...people are instructed in the truths of faith and brought to appreciate the inner joys of religion far more effectively by the annual celebration of our sacred mysteries than by any official pronouncement of the teaching of the Church. Such pronouncements usually reach only a few and the more learned among the faithful; feasts reach them all. The Church's teaching affects the mind primarily; her feasts affect both mind and heart and have a salutary effect upon man's whole nature."

--Pope Pius XI

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| THE SEASON OF GRACE AND JOY | 4 |
| A CORRECT OUTLOOK | 4 |
| ON CHRISTMAS EVE | 6 |
| THE BIRTHDAY ACCORDING TO THE FLESH OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST | 6 |
| MORNING PRAYERS DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON | 8 |
| EVENING PRAYERS DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON | 8 |
| THE CHRIST-CANDLE..... | 10 |
| CAROLING | 10 |
| THE SHEPHERDS | 10 |
| INDIAN CHRISTMAS CAROL..... | 11 |
| CHRISTMAS RECIPES | 12 |
| ST. STEVEN'S DAY..... | 14 |
| ST. JOHN'S WINE | 14 |
| HOLY INNOCENTS | 15 |
| NEW YEAR'S DAY | 16 |
| BLESSING FOR BEER | 16 |
| EPIPHANY | 17 |
| EPIPHANY GIFT | 20 |
| EPIPHANY PRAYERS..... | 20 |
| THE WISE MEN | 21 |
| UBI CARITAS ET AMOR..... | 21 |
| JANUARY 19 AND 21 | 22 |
| ST. BRIGID'S DAY | 22 |
| FEAST OF THE PURIFICATION..... | 23 |

THE Root of Jesse has blossomed.
The Star of Jacob has risen.
A Virgin has brought forth the Savior!
Our God, we praise You.
--OFFICE OF CHRISTMASTIDE

THE SEASON OF GRACE AND JOY

Christmas is a liturgical season of great joy. It lasts forty days, from December 25 to February 2, during which the birth of Jesus Christ, our Savior, is celebrated as one continuous festival. The finale comes with His presentation in the temple. A season most dear to Christian hearts, Christmas is as distinct in the liturgy as Advent, Lent, Easter, or Pentecost. Four weeks of Advent are scarcely enough to "prepare the way of the Lord" for His coming to us as King. However, if we have used that season as a preparation, we are ready now to receive the Redeemer who will deliver us from sin in answer to our requests. Christ's coming must be, not a lovely idyll or a pastoral scene, but a reality accomplished in our lives and our children's. Forty days of rejoicing are not too long a celebration for so great an event.

The early Church selected December 25, the date of the winter solstice when God the Creator gives the sun an increase of natural light in northern hemispheres, as the day on which to celebrate the birth of the Sun of Justice, Light of the world. Radiating from the Divine Child are a galaxy of wonderful saints whose lives afford a continuing interest in celebrating the feast of His birth.

Micah, who lived in the days of Isaiah, prophesied the birthplace of the Messiah: "Thou, Bethlehem, art a little one among the thousands in Judah; out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be the Ruler of Israel; and His going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity." The name Bethlehem signifies House of Bread. To it at Christmas comes the Savior, who is the Bread of Life. By our participation in this mystery the divine transformation takes place whereby He "re-shapes the body of our lowliness after the body of His splendor."

Our forebears gave the name Christmas to the feast of our Lord's birth because they kept the "Christ Mass" as the heart of their celebrations. Following closely the liturgy of the Church, they centered their customs and wrote their hymns and carols on her practices of the season, adoration, love, joy, and gratitude. Those practices also increased their admiration for His Virgin Mother Mary who gave Almighty God His human form. He had created heaven and earth by His Word, but His becoming Man depended on a creature's FIAT, "Be it done unto me according to Thy Word." Mary consented. Our forebears honored her in their great masterpieces because she is God's Mother. For the same reason the world in our day honors her as Queen of Heaven.

A CORRECT OUTLOOK

It is to our Lady that Christian families must look for help to reestablish Christmas as a season of festivities marking Christ's birth. Either we live the liturgical year with its varying seasons of joy and sorrow, work and rest, or we follow the pattern of the world. Nor is it an easy task to break with the world and the powerful influence of advertising. Their season of Christmas begins around Thanksgiving Day when stores display wares for holiday gift-giving. It lasts until December 24.

Families, who would not dream of eating their Thanksgiving turkey a week in advance or of having their 4th of July picnic in June, give no thought to the fact that, when they awake on December 25, there is not a shred of Christmas left. Every present has been opened. Every carol has been sung. The tree has dried out. Christmas is apt to be a dull day given to over-eating. There was no fast in Advent, so it follows that there can be no feast.

It is difficult to keep one's home dark in Advent penance; to keep a tree fresh outside the door; to refrain from singing carols until Christmas eve. Our children see their friends' trees shimmering with ornaments a week before Christmas. Their houses are bedecked with lights. Television and radio blare carols. Not only is it difficult to keep from celebrating beforehand, it is even more difficult to begin forty days of the Christmas season when all around people are concluding their festivities. How then do families return to the spirit of the Church and begin the season of joy and grace on Christmas eve?

The simplest way is by keeping Advent. Children love to anticipate. When there are empty manger to fill with straws of small sacrifices, when the Mary-Candle is a daily reminder on the dinner table, when Advent hymns are sung in the candlelight of a graceful Advent wreath, children are not anxious to celebrate Christmas before time. That would offend their sense of honor. Older children who make Nativity sets, cut Old Testament symbols to decorate a Jesse tree, or prepare costumes for a Christmas play will find Advent all too short a time to prepare for the coming of Christ the King.[1]

Celebrating Christmas in its season can be accomplished more easily when several families try it together. Frequently there are families who, if only for sentimental reasons, would like to keep the joy and surprise of Christmas for the eve. Christians of the Eastern rite wait until their particular feast of Christmas comes in January. We should likewise begin ours on its proper day. We also need time for our festivities. The Church gives us a period of forty days for rejoicing.

As a child in the suburbs of Boston, my Christmas eve centered around the parish house. On the half-hour groups of children with trumpet accompaniment caroled around the giant tree on the lawn or, when snow was too deep, sang on the rambling veranda. From there they went to sing in the park, at the convent, and at homes of aged parishioners. Back to the parish house, its hearths aglow, children trooped to enjoy warm doughnuts and cider. Early in the evening high school students caroled on the same circuit. Now the parish house was bright with candles and firelight. The night was blue and so frosty cold that the trumpets cut the air. Their "Noel Noel" traveled far and clear. In reply myriads of vigil lights, flickering against lace curtains in every house, returned a bright "Merry Christmas." Carolers returned to the parish house for refreshments.

Half-hourly the charming custom of caroling went on. By nine o'clock the church choir arrived. When the last trolley car had left the carbarns an hour later, a hush fell upon the city making peace on earth a reality. By ten-thirty parents arrived to join the singing and to free the choir for rehearsals.

I remember the breathtaking beauty of the upper church. Its marble altar with golden decorations was resplendent with light. The crib gave new joy each succeeding year. With the singing of Midnight Mass our season of rejoicing began.

Afterwards families walked home together in the sharp cold nights, parents a bit ahead, boys and girls lagging behind. Everywhere vigil lights flickered in homes of the Irish emigrants who began the custom in penal days when priests were being hunted. Telling of the custom in "The Christmas Book,"[2] Father Francis X. Weiser, S.J., writes: "The people had no churches. Priests hid in forests and caves and secretly visited the farms and homes to say Mass there during the night. When Christmas came the faithful placed burning candles in the windows so that any priest who happened to be in the vicinity would be guided to their home through the dark night. Silently he entered and was received by the devout with fervent prayers of gratitude that their home was to become a church during the Holy Night. To justify this practice in the eyes of the English soldiers, the Irish people used to explain: 'We burn the candles that Jesus and Mary looking for a place to stay will find their way to our home.' The English authorities finding this superstition harmless did not bother to suppress it."

A Gaelic name for Christmas eve is "Oidhche na ceapairi"--Night of Cakes. I can still see the cakes through candlelight in kitchens of my childhood. A spanking white cloth on the table set off the two-foot candle bound in evergreens and rising from a bowl of holly to symbolize the Light of the world arising from the Root of Jesse. On the polished black stove were round loaves of sweet buttery bread flecked with currants and candied peel called Irish Christmas "cake." That bread spelled Christmas for us.

After a feast day breakfast early in the morning, our tree was stealthily brought indoors and set into its waiting stand. Balls were hung, tinsel, popcorn, and cranberries festooned to its spreading branches. Then it was time for Mass at dawn.

Every nation has its Christmas bread. The French Canadian uses homemade "Pain d'Habitant," the German, "Christstollen," the Czech "Vanočka." The Italian saves a slice from each Christmas loaf and on St. Blaise day, forty days later, soaks the hard bread in milk and eats it. Many cakes are baked in wreath-shaped pans and circles to symbolize everlasting life. Among these are the Swedish "Julbrod," chock full of citron, raisins, almonds; and the famous Ukrainian poppy seed cake. A recipe for the Irish cake is on p. 41.

ON CHRISTMAS EVE

Once Christian families succeed in giving Christmas its proper setting in the liturgical cycle, they will enjoy the feast. In our house, Christmas begins when the children are awakened and dressed in slippers and robes. Each is given a lighted candle in honor of the Christ-Child. The children come up a long hall, slowly, singing "Silent Night" as they proceed to the living room. Their father has lighted the Christ-Candle and the tree. Family and friends gather round the Nativity scene. Pierce, our oldest child, reads from the Roman Martyrology:

In the forty-second year of the Empire of Octavian Augustus, in the Sixth Age of the world while all the earth was at peace, Jesus Christ, Eternal God, and Son of the Eternal Father, willed to consecrate the world by His gracious coming; having been conceived of the Holy Ghost, and the nine months since His conception having now passed (all kneel), He was born as Man of the Virgin Mary at Bethlehem of Juda. (Very solemnly):

THE BIRTHDAY ACCORDING TO THE FLESH OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

All: Praise be to You, O Christ.

A blessing of the crib and then of the tree is read by the father who uses the prayers of the Church's liturgy.

Father: The Word was made flesh, alleluia.

All: And dwelt among us, alleluia.

Father: O Lord, hear my prayer.

All: And let my cry come to You.

Father: Let us pray. We beseech Thee, Almighty God, bless this crib which we have prepared in honor of the new birth in the flesh of Thine only begotten Son. May all who devoutly see in this image the mystery of His Incarnation be filled with the light of His glory, who with Thee liveth and reigneth forever.

All: Alleluia .

Family and friends sing the *Adeste Fidelis*:

O come, all ye faithful,
Joyous and triumphant,
To Jesus, to Jesus in 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, our Lord.

The procession moves to the Christmas tree or the Jesse tree, decorated with symbols of the Old Testament. All that is needed to bless the tree is a little holy water--children love to sprinkle it--and the following prayer:[3]

Father: Let us pray. O Lord Jesus Christ, who by dying on the Tree of the Cross didst overcome the death of sin caused by our first parents' eating of the forbidden tree of paradise, grant, we beseech Thee, the abundant graces of Thy Nativity, that we may so live as to be worthy living branches of Thyself, the good and ever green Olive Tree, and in Thy strength bear the fruit of good works for eternal life. Who livest and reignest for ever and ever.

All: Alleluia.

We first heard about the Jesse tree in "Worship" magazine. A regular Christmas tree represents the Root of Jesse and is decorated with lights and homemade symbols depicting the ancestors of Jesus or Old Testament events leading to Him. For Adam and Eve we use a rosy apple with two bites taken from it; for Abraham and Isaac, a ram; for Solomon, a temple; for Moses, two tablets of the Law; for David, a star; for Isaias, a hand with a burning coal. These were drawn by an artist friend and cut by the children from bright paper.

Freehand, we cut a pitcher from silver paper to symbolize Rebecca, using a milk jug from Williamsburg as a model. We also cut shells for John the Baptist and sheaves of wheat for Ruth. The children helped their father make a ladder and attach to its rungs tiny angels to symbolize Jacob. We placed a crown bearing twelve stars for our Lady at the top of the tree and above the crown a rose for our Savior who budded from the Root of Jesse. To these we added beautiful hand-carved wooden "O" antiphons and symbols of our Savior made by the Benedictine nuns at Regina Laudis, Bethlehem, Connecticut. Christmas cards with liturgical texts and symbols are widely available, and may well be cut out and hung on the tree for decorations. We have also used the Jesse tree symbols on a small artificial tree which the children when little could decorate and redecorate to their hearts' content without fear of pulling electric lights or breaking heirloom Christmas balls.

Last year we served "Bread of Angels" on Christmas eve. Paper-thin wafers with Nativity scenes imprinted, these were blessed and given to each member of the family and to guests to symbolize that "all who partake of one bread are one body." With the Bread of Angels we used blessed wine. This simple fare helped us to keep the Christmas vigil fast and made it a pleasure to do so. The Bread of Angels was the gift of friends of Polish extraction.

Little children must go back to bed as midnight draws near in our house; but their brother now serves Mass. Two doors away from us the carillon of a famous church peals out the glad news of Christ's birth.

Before we leave the house, a tiny figure of the Infant is placed on the straws of the empty manger beside each child's bed. In this way the first sight to greet him or her on Christmas morning and during the season will be the Savior in swaddling clothes. We hasten to Mass in the darkness of night, reminding ourselves that we are about to celebrate the greatest act of the Christmas feast. We go to greet that Light which now shines in the darkness; we go in the spirit of the shepherds to adore the Son of God and to offer our hearts to Him in His manger. Later during the Offertory, when bread and wine, the noblest of inanimate creatures, are offered by us and for us, we offer our children, our sorrows, our joys and ourselves on the paten, even as the divine Child offers Himself to His Father. Then we make room in our hearts for Christ, true God and true Man, who comes to us cradled in Bread. In His coming in the Christ Mass, we undergo the divine transformation which alone makes Christmas merry. For "merry" in its original sense meant blessed.

MORNING PRAYERS DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON

Children love to pray when they realize that they are saying the same prayers as Catholics all over the world. At Christmas it is easy to introduce such prayers as a family custom. These morning prayers, with variations on special feast days, are said from Christmas eve until Candlemas. They may be used whole or in part depending on the ages of the children in one's family.

Mother: Christ is born to us!

All: Come, let us adore Him.

Father: To the King of the Ages, who is immortal, invisible, the one only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

All: Thanks be to God.

Father: Arise, O Christ, and help us.

All: And deliver us for Your Name's sake. Lord, have mercy on us. Christ, have mercy on us. Lord, have mercy on us.

Father: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. 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.

All: But deliver us from evil.

Father: O Lord, hear my prayer.

All: And let my cry come to You.

Father: Let us pray. O Lord God Almighty, who hast brought us to the beginning of this day, preserve us in the same by Thy power that during this day we may not fall into any sin, but that all our words, thoughts and work may be directed to doing Thy holy will. Through our Lord Jesus Christ.

All: Alleluia.

Mother: This day Christ is born, this day the Savior has appeared. This day Angels are singing on earth, Archangels are rejoicing. This day the just are glad and say:

All: Glory to God in the highest, alleluia.

When children in our family are late or fussy, we sing the morning offering learned during babyhood:

"Good morning, dear God, we offer to You our thoughts, words and actions and all that we do."

This is followed by the Lord's Prayer, a Hail Mary, and an appropriate ejaculation.

EVENING PRAYERS DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON

In the evening families may again use the official prayers from the liturgy of the Church.

Mother: May the Lord Almighty grant us a peaceful night and a perfect end.

All: Alleluia.

Father: Be sober, be watchful! For your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goes about seeking someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith.

All: Thanks be to God.

Father: Our help is in the Name of the Lord.

All: Who made heaven and earth.

Father: I confess to Almighty God,

All: to blessed Mary ever Virgin, / to blessed Michael the Archangel, to blessed John the Baptist, / to the holy apostles Peter and Paul, to all the saints, and to you my family, / that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed: / through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault. / Therefore I beseech blessed Mary ever Virgin, / blessed Michael the Archangel, blessed John the Baptist, / the holy apostles Peter and Paul, all the saints, and you my family, / to pray to the Lord our God for me.

Since children love to sing their prayers, any Christmas carol or hymn such as Silent Night or Adeste Fidelis may be sung at this time. (When children are very, very tired we simply sing a hymn and call that our evening prayer.)

Father: Protect us, Lord, while we are awake and safeguard us while we sleep, that we may keep watch with Christ and rest in peace.

Mother: Sing to the Lord a new song, Sing to the Lord, all you lands.

All: Sing to the Lord, bless His Name; announce His salvation, day after day.

Mother: Tell His glory among the nations among the people His wondrous deeds.

All: For great is the Lord and highly to be praised, awesome is He, beyond all gods.

Mother: For all the gods of the nations are things of naught, but the Lord made the heavens.

All: Splendor and majesty go before Him, praise and grandeur are in His sanctuary.

Mother: Give to the Lord, you families of nations, give to the Lord glory and praise, give to the Lord the glory due His name!

All: Bring gifts and enter His courts, worship the Lord in holy attire.

Mother: Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice, let the sea and what fills it resound, let the plains be joyful and all that is in them!

All: Then shall all the trees of the forest exult before the Lord, for He comes, for He comes to rule the earth.

Mother: He shall rule the world with justice and the peoples with His constancy.

All: Protect us, Lord, while we are awake and safeguard us while we sleep, that we may keep watch with Christ and rest in peace.

Father: O Lord, hear my prayer.

All: And let my cry come to You.

Father: Let us pray. Visit this home, we beseech Thee, O Lord, and drive far from it all snares of the enemy. Let Thy holy Angels dwell herein who may keep us in peace, and let Thy blessing be always upon us. Through our Lord Jesus Christ.

All: Alleluia.

Father: May the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, keep us forever.

All: Alleluia.

Prayers in our house are said at the crib during Christmas. It might be well for parents to meditate on the words of Abbot Marmion: "When we would penetrate into the sanctuaries of God's secrets, He says to us; 'This is my beloved Son, hear ye Him.' This is the solution of all: Jesus stretching out His little arms to us in the crib is God. As we gaze on Jesus, we have no difficulty in understanding that God is love."

Parents should avoid buying the ugly representations of the Babe of Bethlehem which flood the market at this time of year. It is better to carve a Madonna and Child from soap or to encourage children to draw and cut out their own Nativity figures. A Hummel infant in a wooden manger is more effective than a set of cheap figures. If your children are too small to have a delicate statue under their tiny hands, a lovely Nativity scene of folded cardboard is available. The stable background with the usual crib figures are easily assembled; it is the sort of thing children (or teachers) will want to put near their windows to share with others.[4]

THE CHRIST-CANDLE

An attractive Christ-Candle for the family table may be made at home by melting paraffin or used white candles. Take a No. 3 size empty can, the kind in which juice comes. Remove one end of the can. Across the top open place a pencil to which is tied a ten inch piece of string for the wick. Pour the melted wax or paraffin into the can until full. Allow to cool. Then place in the refrigerator for an hour. When the bottom of the can is removed by a can opener, the candle will slip out easily. It may be entwined with holly or other evergreens to signify the Light from the Root of Jesse and lighted at meal times.

A child may cut from old Christmas cards a Madonna and Child, a star or angel, and attach these with rubber cement to the candle. Our eight-year-old daughter decorated a delightful candle by pinning to it tiny bright metal stars, spangles and snowflakes by means of straight pins. These decorations come packaged at Christmas goods section of five and ten cent stores, or are available from mail order houses.

CAROLING

When Advent hymns have been sung until December 24, there is a delightful freshness to Christmas carols. Among our favorites are "Christ Was Born on Christmas Day" and "Little Jesus, Hang Your Head, You Has Got a Manger Bed." [5] There are many American carols, among them Holland's "There's a Song in the Air," which stress the kingship of Christ. The following song from "The Story of the Redemption for Children" published by the Gregorian Institute of America is one which children learn easily.

THE SHEPHERDS

Te Lucis ante Terminum

1. That night while people were asleep
The Shepherds watched their flocks of sheep.
Then suddenly an angel bright
Was standing in a blaze of light.

2. "Be not afraid," the angel said,
"I bring good news to make you glad.
For in a a stable cave forlorn
The Savior of the world is born."

3. A host of angels in the sky
Began a song of love and joy:
"Glory to God in Heaven's height,
And peace to men whose wills are right."

4. The Shepherds came and found the Child,
Within the manger, sweet and mild.
They found Him with His Mother dear,
And good St. Joseph kneeling near.

Another carol which deserves to be better known among Catholics is the lovely Indian Christmas Carol written by St. John de Brebeuf, S.J., a French Jesuit missionary among the Huron Indian tribes. Father de Brebeuf translated the Christmas story into Indian imagery for the Indians at whose hands he later suffered martyrdom.

There is a statue of the Child Jesus wrapped in a robe of rabbits' fur in St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York City. A booklet on this early devotion of the Indians to the Holy Infant is available at the entrance to the Cathedral.

INDIAN CHRISTMAS CAROL

1. Twas in the moon of wintertime
When all the birds had fled,
That mighty GitchiManitou
Sent angel choirs instead;
Before their light the stars grew dim,
And wond'ring hunters heard the hymn:
(Refrain)

Refrain:

Jesus, your King is born,
Jesus is born,
In excelsis gloria

2. Within a lodge of broken bark
The tender Babe was found,
A ragged robe of rabbit skin
Enwrapp'd Hid beauty 'round.
But as the hunter braves drew night,
The angel song rang loud and high:
(Refrain)

3. The earliest moon of wintertime
Is not so round and fair
As was the ring of glory on
The helpless infant there.
The chiefs from far before Him knelt
With gifts of fox and beaver pelt.
(Refrain)

4. O children of the forest free, O sons
 O sons of Manitou,
 The Holy Child of earth and heav'n
 Is born today for you.
 Come kneel before the radiant boy,
 Who brings you beauty, peace and joy.
 (Refrain)

CHRISTMAS RECIPES

Rice is a traditional dish in countries as widely separated as Denmark, where it is called "Risengrod," and Spain, where "Arroz Dulce" is its name. The following recipe from Puerto Rico may be used with cocoanut milk; but it is equally as delicious as plain American rice pudding when cow's milk is used. Prepared ahead of time, it gives a mother a chance to enjoy Christmas morning. (Cocoanut milk may be purchased in stores in Spanish sections or may be made by soaking a package of dry cocoanut for an hour in one cup and a half of water and then straining it.)

Arroz Dulce

Cooking time: about 1 hour

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1/2 cup raw rice | 1/2 cup seedless raisins |
| 2 cups boiling water | 1 egg |
| 1/2 cups milk or cocoanut milk | 1 tablespoon butter |
| 1/4 cup sugar | 1 teaspoon vanilla extract |
| 1/4 teaspoon salt | |

Wash rice. Put in a saucepan with the boiling water and boil 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Drain and rinse under cold running water. Scald milk in top of double boiler over boiling water. Add the rice, sugar, raisins, and salt, and cook, covered, until rice is tender--about 40 minutes. Beat egg well, and add to it 2 heaping tablespoons of the rice mixture. Mix well and pour back into remaining rice mixture in the double boiler. Cook, stirring constantly for 1 minute. Add butter and stir until melted. Remove from heat. Add vanilla and mix well. Serve warm or cold.

Another time-saver for a busy mother are delicious Christmas morning muffins made in a jiffy when cranberries have been prepared beforehand.

Cranberry Muffins

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 cup fresh cranberries | 2 tablespoons melted butter |
| 1/2 cup sugar | 2 eggs beaten |
| 2 cups prepared biscuit mix | 3/4 cup milk |

Wash and clean the cranberries, cut them in halves, cover them with the sugar, and let stand overnight. Combine the other ingredients gently--don't worry about lumps--add the cranberries and fill well-greased muffin pans two thirds full. Bake in a 400 degree oven for 20 to 25 minutes. Makes 12 two-inch muffins.[7]

Many traditional recipes, among them mince pie in the shape of a manger, Greek Christmas bread, Christstollen, and Brioche are given in "Family Advent Customs." For little children we feel that a birthday cake, preferably a white one, with a single candle, carries out the idea of Jesus' birthday. They always enjoy singing "Happy Birthday, dear Jesus," before they cut the cake.

A family we met at a Cana conference uses traditional fruit cake as Baby Jesus' Birthday Cake. To it they add a candle for each child. Children want to give the Child a present. Christina Rosetti's poem, "What Can I

Give Him?" is appealing, easy to memorize, and answers the little one who wants to give Jesus something special.

What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd,
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man,
I would do my part;
Yet what can I give Him?
Give my heart.

Another poem easily memorized is "Our Brother Is Born":

Now every child that dwells on earth,
Stand up, stand up and sing:
The passing night has given birth
Unto the children's King.
Sing sweet is the flute,
Sing clear is the horn
Sing joy for the children,
Come Christmas morn:
Little Christ Jesus
Our Brother is born![8]

Older boys and girls will enjoy making Christmas Lady Cookies. An easy recipe follows.

Christmas Lady Cookies

| | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|
| 2 eggs separated | 1 teaspoon vanilla |
| 1/2 cup confectioner's sugar | 1/2 cup cake flour |
| 1/4 teaspoon salt | |

Beat egg whites until stiff; add 1/4 cup sugar, beating all the while. Beat the yolks until thick and lemon colored, then beat in remaining 1/4 cup of sugar. Fold the white mixture into the yolks, then fold in vanilla, flour and salt. Drop on ungreased paper-lined cookie sheets and bake for 15 minutes in a slow oven (300 degrees). When cool remove from paper and sprinkle with confectioner's sugar.[9]

English eggnog is also a tradition for Christmas. In "Cooking for Christ," Florence Berger gives a delicious one. We cut the proportions in half.

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 6 eggs | 1-1/2 pints of cream |
| 1-1/8 cups of sugar | 1 quart of milk |
| 1 pint brandy | 1/2 cup of powdered sugar |
| 1/2 pint rum | |

Beat egg yolks with sugar; add brandy and rum slowly, so eggs will not coagulate. Beat in milk and pint of cream. Fold in three stiffly beaten egg whites. Beat the remaining egg whites very stiff, add powdered sugar and 1/2 pint cream. Float this egg white mixture on the eggnog. Chill over night before serving.

Ideally, mothers should go to Mass daily. Actually it is often impossible because of distance from church, working schedules of husbands, or very young children in the family. In discussing this with groups of mothers, it was noted that just after breakfast, when children have gone off to school and just before the baby's ten o'clock bath, is as a rule the easiest time for a mother to read the Mass of the day and make her spiritual communion. The mother who follows the forty days of Christmas in a missal containing liturgical notes will gain many practical suggestions for celebrating this season.

ST. STEVEN'S DAY

Leading the great saints who radiate from the Christ-Child is St. Stephen, whose feast is December 26. First of the martyrs, he was stoned by the Jews because he courageously proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah. His name signifies "the crowned." In a day like ours, when hatred of enemies floods the minds of children, the soldier-saint Stephen, who loved his enemies, is an excellent model for them and for us.

On St. Stephen's Day our night prayers at the crib are varied in this fashion from those on p. 14:

Father: Christ, the New-born, today crowned blessed Stephen.

All: Come, let us adore Him.

Mother: Stephen, full of grace and power, was working great wonders and signs among the people.

All: Thanks be to God.

Father: You crowned him with glory and honor, O Lord.

All: You have given him rule over the works of Your hands.

Father: Let us pray. Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that we may imitate him whose memory we celebrate, so as to learn to love even our enemies; because we now solemnize his martyrdom who knew how to pray even for his persecutors to our Lord Jesus Christ Thy Son, who liveth and reigneth forever. Alleluia.

All: Alleluia

ST. JOHN'S WINE

When our children were little, we celebrated December 27, the feast of St. John, very simply. After blessing wine with holy water and the sign of the Cross, we made a punch, adding water and sugar, and poured it into our best goblets. Then at the supper table Daddy would begin the toast, touching his goblet to mine, and say: "I drink you the love of St. John." In turn I touched the goblets of each of the children. They followed suit and would "drink you the love of St. John." It is a delightful custom and one they cherish.

Its memory comes back to them many times. Not infrequently when they are given a special drink--even in warm weather--they say: "Today is such a saint's feast! Let's drink to his love." And the clinking of glasses begins as they toast the patron of the day.

Now that they are older we have a more solemn blessing in memory of St. John, who remained unharmed by a cup of poisoned wine after he had blessed it with the Sign of the Cross. Whenever a priest of the family is home, the 22nd Psalm is read, followed by the Lord's Prayer and a series of versicles. Then the official prayers for the Blessing of Wine are recited. Otherwise the following blessing from the Ritual is read at the dinner table.

Father: Lord Jesus Christ, Thou didst call Thyself the vine and Thy holy Apostles the branches; and out of all those who love Thee, Thou didst desire to make a good vineyard. Bless this wine and pour into it the might of Thy benediction so that every one who drinks or takes of it, may through the intercession of Thy beloved disciple, the holy Apostle and Evangelist John, be freed from every disease or attack of illness and obtain health of body and soul. Who livest and reignest forever.

All: Amen.

A toast to the love of St. John is then pledged by all the family. St. John's wine is easy to make.

Recipe for St. John's wine

| | |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| 2 cups wine | 2 inches stick cinnamon |
| 2 whole cloves | 1 cardamon seed |
| | 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg |

Boil the spices in the wine for about five minutes. Strain the wine. Serve hot.

HOLY INNOCENTS

Holy Innocents or "Childermas Day" is celebrated on December 28. The Gospel tells the story simply. "Herod sent and slew all the boys in Bethlehem who were two years old or under." He had intended to include the Son of God among the murdered babies. To recall the grief of their mothers the Church wears purple today. In Mass she hushes her joyous Gloria in Excelsis and the Alleluias.

And yet there is joy in her services. Children sing with the choirs in the great cathedrals; and in ancient times other functions were given to them--hence the name "Childermas" or Children's Mass.

The feast of the Holy Innocents is an excellent time for parents to inaugurate the custom of blessing their children. From the Ritual comes the form which we use on solemn occasions, such as First Communion. But all parents need to do is to sign a cross on the child's forehead with the right thumb dipped in holy water and say:

"May God bless you, and may He be the Guardian of your heart and mind--the Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen."

As I go from bed to bed at night, I just make the sign of the Cross with my hand over each child while saying: "May God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost keep you safe this night."

The custom of blessing children is easiest to establish with a baby or toddler and it grows with them. For older children the realization that parental blessings are as old as the human race can be established from reading the Old Testament. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob blessed their children. Before his journey Tobias blessed his son with the words: "May you have a good journey, and God be with you on your way, and His angels accompany you." I have seen a newly ordained priest kneel for his parents' blessing and then give them his first blessing. It is easy for a child who receives his father's or mother's blessing to see them as God's representatives. Encouraging parental blessings, St. Ambrose says: "You may not be rich; you may be unable to bequeath great possessions to your children; but one thing you can give them--the heritage of your blessing. And it is better to be blessed than to be rich."

We commemorate the spilling of the blood of the Holy Innocents by using a cherry or strawberry sauce, the kind you buy or preserve, poured over a vanilla pudding. A traditional recipe for the day, given in "Cooking for Christ," is:

Blanc Mange

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| 3 cups milk | 1 pinch salt |
| 1/4 cup cornstarch | 1 beaten egg |
| 4 tablespoons sugar | 1 teaspoon almond flavoring |

Scald two and one-fourth cups of milk. Mix three-fourths cup of cold milk, cornstarch, two tablespoons of sugar and salt. Add slowly to the hot milk. Cool until thick (about five minutes). Add egg and rest of sugar. Finish cooking for a minute or two. Flavor with almond. Mold.

Mrs. Berger adds that it is a sure trick to add two or three tablespoons of the hot cornstarch mixture to the egg before stirring it into the pudding to prevent curdling. Rennet, junket, or a Bavarian cream may be used in place of Blanc Mange.

Prayers for Childermas include a versicle and the Collect from the Mass in addition to those on p. 14.

Father: Enraged, Herod put to death many male children

All: In Bethlehem of Juda, the city of David.

Father: Let us pray. O God, whose praise the martyred Innocents this day proclaimed not by speaking but by dying, put to death all vices within us, that Thy faith which our tongues profess, our lives also by their actions may declare.

All: Amen.

NEW YEAR'S DAY

The Church begins the New Year With the Holy Name of Jesus. Liturgically this great feast commemorates the first shedding of His blood for our redemption. On the same day, along with celebrating the giving of His Name Jesus, which means "Savior," we also honor Mary's divine Motherhood. Today's Epistle bids us to circumcise our hearts, as it were, "to live soberly, justly, and godly in this world."

New Year's is a day of hospitality among many people, especially the French. In England it was a day set aside for godparents; and godcakes are still given to children on this day in many places. It should be easy to keep New Year's day as a feast on which we honor godparents and repay them for the responsibility they have assumed toward our children.

An idea is to hold open house and let the children's godparents drop in when they please. Have ready beer or ale for grown-ups, and a children's punch. Perhaps you might serve beer which has been blessed and pretzels for grown-ups, punch plus initial cookies for children. Pretzels, incidentally, were originally made in the shape of a hand by medieval monks who gave them to children visitors.

BLESSING FOR BEER

This prayer attributes the power of brewing to God and asks Him to make the beverage beneficial to man. The father sprinkles beer with holy water and prays:

"Bless, O Lord, this created thing, beer, which by Thy power has been made from kernels of grain. May it be a healthful beverage for men; and grant that by invoking Thy holy Name all who drink thereof may find it a help for the body and protection for the soul. Through Christ our Lord. Amen."

Children's Punch

1 qt. cranberry juice
1 can frozen concentrated orange juice
1 can frozen lemonade concentrate
1 No. 5 can pineapple juice
Ginger ale as needed

Combine cranberry juice, orange juice and lemonade concentrate with the pineapple juice and enough ginger ale to make desired strength. Pour over ice in a punch bowl and garnish with maraschino cherries and pieces of pineapple.

Initial Cookies

2/3 cup butter or margarine
1 cup sugar
2 yolks or 2 whole eggs

4 cups pastry flour
1/2 teaspoon almond flavoring

Cream butter and sugar, add eggs and blend together until smooth. Add almond flavoring and flour. Chill for 1 hour in a long roll. Then form into the initials of the godparents visiting for the day. Allow to stand 2 or 3 hours on a cookie sheet to dry the surface. Then brush with egg white mixed with a tablespoon of milk; and sprinkle with chopped almond and sugar. Bake in a moderate oven for about 15 minutes. These cookies are like almond pretzels.[10]

Bring out their christening robes, if you have saved them. Reminisce about each child's baptismal day, which is his or her rebirth in Christ. With godparents and family gathered in the living room, light the children's baptismal candles, or light a holy candle for each child. When the candles are ready, the father presents one to each child and prays as the Church did at baptism: "Receive this burning light, and safeguard your baptism by a blameless life. Keep the Commandments of God, that when our Lord shall come to claim His own, you may be worthy to greet Him, with all the saints in the heavenly court and live forever. Amen."

Grown-ups and children repeat together their baptismal vows:

I (name--) promise to renounce the devil and all his works and allurements.

Mother: The grace of God our Savior has appeared to all men, instructing us, in order that rejecting ungodliness and worldly lusts, we may live temperately and justly and piously in this world.

Then follows a Christmas song and the prayer of the day.

The Word was made flesh, alleluia, alleluia.
And dwelt among us, alleluia, alleluia.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost.
(Repeat first two lines)

Father: By reason of His very great love

All: Wherewith He has loved us, God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, alleluia.

Father: Let us pray. O God, by the fruitful Virginity of the Blessed Mary Thou hast given to mankind the rewards of eternal salvation; grant, we beseech Thee, that we may benefit through the intercession of her by whom we received the Author of Life, our Lord Jesus Christ.

All: Amen.

A New Year's Day ceremony takes only a few minutes, but leaves a memory that lasts a lifetime and builds a sense of security in children. It also focuses their attention on the wonderful gift of Baptism.

EPIPHANY

Like so many of our family customs, the celebration of the King's Feast, or Epiphany, began when our children were toddlers. They put their shoes outside the door for gifts from the Kings, and a few almond cookies with a small toy were all they received. In their visit the Wise Men left a tiny gold paper crown on each Christ-Child figure, and raised the family manger to a throne draped in red corduroy and gold paper. (Red crepe paper is equally elective). At the Nativity scene they left figures of the Magi and their retinue.

I used to make paper crowns of gold so each of our children could be a King. Then, using bright pieces of fabric, I would hem both ends and draw a contrasting wide ribbon through one. This gathered the material into a cape for the King. The children chose their names--Caspar, Balthassar, Melchior. Their day was spent journeying to Bethlehem on rocking-horse or tiny saw-horse camels. At supper we served a simple cake with white frosting topped by a crown of gumdrops. Three pieces of the cake were given away in honor of the Wise Men. It was always a job to keep the crown from losing its "jewels" before it was served. After supper each child was tossed to the ceiling three times, in honor of each of the Magi; then the ritual began.

With three Kings in procession we blessed the house with holy water and marked the doors with blessed chalk. We put 19 + C + M + B + 70, using the initials of the Magi and the year, so that our coming and going would be in search of the Truth. The baby would be rocked to sleep with "We Three Kings of Orient Are," while the others cuddled up to hear carols. We lived in a Spanish neighborhood and were not alone in celebrating "The King's Feast." Although small, the children had fulfilled its chief purpose--to honor Christ as King.

Epiphany means the revelation of the Messiah's coming to the Gentiles whom the Magi represent. It is one of the five days of the year called "a day most holy" in the Canon of the Mass. In Spain, Portugal, Central and South America, the feast is kept with almost as much solemnity as Christmas. Now that our children are older--the oldest ten--the blessing of our apartment is sometimes given by a priest. Using water blessed on the eve of Epiphany, he reads a Christmas antiphon, the Magnificat, two prayers, and the final blessing.

In the absence of a priest the family gathers around the crib with lighted candles and recites or sings:

All: A Child is born in Bethlehem, alleluia!
Full joyous sings Jerusalem, alleluia, alleluia.
From Orient, behold the star, alleluia,
And holy kings come from afar, alleluia, alleluia.

The father reads the Gospel for the Feast of the Epiphany, St. Matthew 2:1-12.

All: From the East came the Magi to Bethlehem to adore the Lord; and opening their treasures, they offered costly gifts: gold to the Great King, incense to the true God, and myrrh in symbol of His burial, alleluia!

While the father sprinkles the rooms of the house with Epiphany water obtained from the church or with ordinary holy water, the mother and children recite the canticle of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Magnificat.

My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
Because He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaid,
for behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
Because He who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is His Name;
And His mercy is from generation to generation
toward those who fear Him.
He has shown might with His arm;
He has scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart.
He has put down the mighty from their thrones
and has exalted the lowly.
The hungry He has filled with good things
and the rich He has sent empty away.
He has given help to Israel His servant,
mindful of His mercy--
As He promised our fathers--
toward Abraham and his descendants forever.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Alleluia.

All: From the East came the Magi to Bethlehem to adore the Lord; and opening their treasures, they offered costly gifts: gold to the great King, incense to the true God, and myrrh in symbol of His burial, alleluia!

Father: Many shall come from Saba.

All: Bearing gold and incense.

Father: O Lord, hear my prayer.

All: And let my cry come unto Thee.

Father: Let us pray. O God, who by the guidance of a star didst this day reveal Thy Only-Begotten Son to the Gentiles, grant that we who know Thee by faith may be brought to the contemplation of the heavenly majesty. Through the same Jesus Christ.

All: Amen.

All: Be enlightened and shine forth, O Jerusalem, for thy light is come, and upon thee is risen the glory of the Lord, Jesus Christ, born of the virgin Mary.

Father: Nations shall walk in thy light, and kings in the brilliance of thy rising.

All: And the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

Father: Let us pray. O Lord, Almighty God, bless this house that it may become a shelter of health, chastity, self-conquest, humility, goodness, mildness, obedience to the Commandments, and thanksgiving to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Upon this house and those who dwell herein may Thy blessing remain forever. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

With blessed chalk the lintels above the door are marked with the initials of the three kings and with crosses. We use the following form:

Father: Let us pray. O Lord God, through the power of the priest Thou didst bless this creature chalk to make it helpful to man. Grant that we who use it with faith and inscribe with it the names of Thy saints Caspar, Melchior, and Balthassar upon the entrance of our homes, may through their merits and petition enjoy physical health and spiritual protection. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

The father then writes the initials of the names of the Magi separated by crosses and the year above the door in this manner:

19+C+M+B+70

In conclusion the following hymn is sung or prayed:

The star of Jacob leadeth them, alleluia!
From Saba to blest Bethlehem, alleluia, alleluia.
Gold, myrrh, and incense pure they bring, alleluia.
To Mary's Child, God, Man and King, alleluia, alleluia!

This home service may also be used the evening before Epiphany or any day during the Octave.

Sometimes a mother will say, "Our children are too big for processions--John is eleven." Boys of eleven or any age love cake. Forget the processions if your children are older, and teach them a joyful wholesome use of food, as the Church intends, by celebrating feast days. For King's Day let a boy or girl bake a cake with prepared mixes and then build a gumdrop crown on it. Better still, fill the house with a feeling of the Epiphany by baking a traditional cake with a bean in it, letting whoever receives the bean be King for the day.

Twelfth Night Cake

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 cup shortening | 1/2 teaspoon salt |
| 2-2/3 cups sugar | 1-1/2 cups milk |
| 5-1/2 cups flour | 2 teaspoons vanilla |
| 5 teaspoons baking powder | 6 beaten egg whites |

Cream shortening and sugar. Add milk alternately with sifted dry ingredients. Fold in beaten egg whites. Add vanilla. Bake in three 9-inch greased layer tins in a moderate oven (375 degrees) for about 30 minutes. Frost and top the cake with a crown of gumdrops.

EPIPHANY GIFT

An inexpensive gift for children is candied fruit peel. Its jeweled crustiness makes it ideal for Epiphany. Somehow the commercial producers have a way of making all peel taste the same. Peel may be wrapped in gold paper as gifts for a children's Epiphany party.

Remove peel from oranges, grapefruit, or lemons--as much as you wish to candy. Be sure that white inner rind stays on peel. Slice it into 1/4 inch wide strips, as long and uniform as possible. Place in a saucepan, cover with cold water, bring to a boil, and pour off liquid. Repeat process five more times.

After sixth boiling, cover peel with cold water, boil peel until tender; then pour off water. Measure peel in a measuring pitcher, add on equal quantity of sugar, put both back into saucepan. Add barely enough water to be seen through the peel, bring water to a boil. (An asbestos pad under pan will maintain low heat). Reduce heat and simmer until syrup is thick. This will take several hours.

Place a wire cake cooler in a large flat roasting pan and spread peel over wire. When it is well drained and cold, roll the peel in granulated sugar and let it stand overnight. It may be necessary to roll peel in sugar again the second day. Place in airtight container until ready for use or roll in gold paper as gift.[12]

EPIPHANY PRAYERS

For the families that do not have an Epiphany home service, the following evening prayers are appropriate.

Father: Christ has appeared among us.

All: Come, let us adore Him.

Mother: The precious gifts which the Magi brought to the Lord this day are threefold, and they are signs of divine mysteries. By gold the power of the King is signified, by frankincense His great priesthood, by myrrh the burial of the Lord.

All: The Magi worshipped the Author of our salvation in the crib, and of their treasures they brought to Him gifts of mystic nature.

Youngest Child: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost.

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

Father: Let us pray. O God, by the leading of a star Thou didst manifest Thine only begotten Son to the Gentiles on this day; mercifully grant that we who know Thee by faith, may be brought to contemplate the beauty of Thy majesty. Through the same Jesus Christ Thy Son.

All: Alleluia.

The following hymn serves well as a conclusion. Additional verses may be composed by members of the family.

THE WISE MEN

Jesu Dulcis Memoria

Now there appeared a brilliant Star
Which led the wise Men from afar.
They came and, kneeling down, adored
And offered gifts to Christ, the Lord.

The Church has chosen the Sunday within the octave of Epiphany as the Feast of the Holy Family and as a day for the restoration of the true spirit of family life. Americans and Canadians should be rightly proud of this feast. It is North American in origin, founded in Montreal in 1663. The Mass and Office of the day give Christian parents an opportunity to pray that their family life may be sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Family life becomes sanctified when parents carry out St. John Chrysostom's plea to make each home a family church. This idea may seem far-fetched. Yet Christians fulfill the sacrament of Matrimony in their homes. Penance and Holy Eucharist are administered in the home in times of sickness, as is Extreme Unction. In danger of death, a newborn baby may receive Baptism at home.

It is in today's Epistle that families will find norms for shaping Christ-like lives. "Brethren, put on therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience. Bear with one another and forgive one another, if anyone has a grievance against any other; even as the Lord has forgiven you, so also do you forgive. But above all these things have charity which is the bond of perfection. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts; unto that peace, indeed, you were called in one body. Show yourselves thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you abundantly; in all wisdom teach and admonish one another by psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing in your hearts to God by his grace. Whatever you do in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

On this Feast of the Holy Family, we vary the usual Christmastide prayers by using the following hymn. The sentiments expressed make it peculiarly appropriate as a Christian family song.

UBI CARITAS ET AMOR

"Where Abideth Charity and Love"

Where abideth charity and love, God is ever there.
All together one in love of Christ, our blessed Lord.
Let us sing in exultation of one accord.
Live we in holy fear and gentle love our life in God.
And give we to one another our hearts truly. (Repeat first line)

And whenever we come together in mind heart
There is no fear of quarreling among us to drive apart.

Cease all angry thoughts and bitter words, all evils end.
And Christ, our Brother, comes to live among us, our Guest and Friend.
Where abideth charity and love, God is ever there.

JANUARY 19 AND 21

On the feast of St. Canute the Fourth, the Danes honor a great king and martyr. At Christmas a cake baked in the form of a boar is brought to the dining room table, but it is not eaten until St. Canute's Day, January 19, when their Christmas season ends.

We use a somewhat similar custom on the feast of St. Agnes, two days later. A cake is baked on her feast in a lamb mold.[15] It is frosted white and made woolly with cocoanut shreds. Raisins serve for the eyes, a half cherry for the mouth. The cake has a twofold meaning. It commemorates St. Agnes' name which means lamb or victim in Latin, and pure in Greek. It also reminds our children of the custom of placing two lambs on the altar of the Basilica where her relics lie. The animals are blessed by the abbot and sent to a cloister where they are reared. From their wool come the palliums sent by the Pope to archbishops who wear them on their shoulders as symbols of the sheep carried by the Good Shepherd.

St. Agnes is a wonderful saint for teen-agers because she remained innocent amid pagan corruption and died at thirteen rather than sully herself. Rome still keeps marked the path she trod to martyrdom.

A suitable prayer for today (in addition to those on p. 14) is from the hymn by Adam of St. Victor:

Father: Let us gain courage for our own battle by honoring the martyrdom of the glorious virgin Agnes. St. Agnes, vessel of honor, flower of unfading fragrance, beloved of the choirs of Angels, you are an example to the worth of virtue and chastity. O you who wear a Martyr's palm and a virgin's wreath, pray for us that, though unworthy of a special crown, we may have our names written in the list of Saints.

All: Alleluia.

ST. BRIGID'S DAY

The Irish love to sing at their work. Ancient Gaelic songs for all kinds of work may still be heard at the annual "Feis" ("fesh" or festival) in big cities. There are songs for milking and for gathering honey, spinning songs and carding songs. Their rhythm always follows the motions of the body. So it isn't surprising when Maura Laverty in her "Cookbook" recommends any song in waltz time for the kneading of "Barm Brack," a traditional Irish bread for St. Brigid's Day on February 1. It is a wholesome golden loaf sparkling with a shining sugar glaze.

Barm Brack

| | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| 4 cups flour | 1 cup milk (tepid) |
| 1 teaspoon cinnamon | 1 beaten egg |
| 1 tablespoon yeast | 3/4 cup raisins |
| 4 tablespoons butter | 1/2 cup currants |
| 6 tablespoons sugar | 4 tablespoons chopped peel |

Warm milk until it is lukewarm. Melt butter in it. Cream yeast with 1 tablespoon of sugar and add 1/2 tepid milk mixture. Add beaten egg. Sift cinnamon with flour into a bowl. Make a well in the center and pour the yeast mixture into it. Sprinkle with flour and leave in a warm place until yeast forms a honeycomb. Mix to a dough with remainder of the milk. Turn onto a floured board. Knead into mixture 5 tablespoons of sugar, 3/4 cup of raisins, 1/4 cup of currants, and 4 tablespoons of chopped peel. The fineness of texture of yeast bread depends upon thorough kneading. It is a one, two, three movement, and to do it properly, you must get rhythm into it. Miss Laverty writes: "I find it helps me to sing 'Red, red roses' as I knead." Put the bread into a bowl, brush it with butter, cover, and leave in a warm place until doubled in bulk. Knead again, put into

greased pans, brush with butter, and cover until doubled in bulk again. Bake 40 minutes at 450 degrees F. (hot oven). A few minutes before the cooking is finished, take the Brack from the oven, brush with egg white, sprinkle with fine sugar, and return to the oven for a minute or two.

FEAST OF THE PURIFICATION

The feast of the Purification of our Blessed Mother closes the forty days of the Christmas season. The day is also called the Presentation of the Child in the Temple, or the feast of Candlemas. On this day each member of the family should receive his or her own blessed candle to be lighted on birthdays, baptismal anniversaries, first Holy Communion, and in sickness. This is another appropriate occasion to invite friends to a home ceremony.

The family, who with lighted candles goes in spirit to the Temple with our Lady, will learn a wonderful lesson of her humility. When Mary went to offer her first-born Son, Joseph carried the offering of the poor, two turtle-doves, symbols of purity and fidelity. According to Jewish law, one would be offered as a holocaust and the other for a sin offering. The Book of Leviticus reads: "The priest shall make atonement for her sin, and thus she will be made clean." Actually Mary, the God-bearer, was not subject to such a rite--no "purification" was necessary after a virginal giving birth to Christ. Nevertheless in her humility she observed the Law.

As the Holy Family enter the Temple, the aged Simeon and Anna, called by the Holy Spirit, wait to see the Child. It had been promised to Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Savior. Mary, the living "Ark of the Covenant," guided by the same Spirit, welcomes the saintly old man and puts the Salvation of the world into his arms. "Now," he says, "Thou dost dismiss Thy servant in peace, O Lord, because mine eyes have seen Thy salvation which Thou hast prepared to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."

The blessing of candles, which takes place on this feast, is one of the three principal popular blessings conferred by the Church. Ashes and palms are the other two. The father of a family begins the home ceremony by gathering the family in candlelight around the crib for a last time.

Father: Lord Jesus Christ, the true Light that enlightens every man who comes into the world, pour forth Thy blessing upon these candles; sanctify them by the light of Thy grace and mercifully grant that as candles by their visible light scatter the darkness of night, so too our hearts, burning with invisible fire, may be freed from all blindness of sin. With the eyes of our soul purified by Thy Light, may we discern those things that art pleasing to Thee and helpful to us, so that having finished the darksome journey of this life, we may come to never-fading joys through Thee, O Jesus Christ, Savior of the world. In perfect Trinity Thou livest and reignest God forever.

All: Alleluia.

Christmas evening prayers follow the blessing (p. 14).

With the family and friends we usually have a candlelight procession from the dining room through the halls to the living room. There a Simeon of ten in a borrowed white Jewish prayer cap awaits Mary with her doll, wrapped in swaddling clothes to symbolize Baby Jesus, and a young Joseph carrying a cage with two pigeons made from modeling clay. In candlelight Simeon takes the child and prays his canticle. Then he blesses Joseph and Mary and adds: "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be contradicted. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Then the Antiphon, "It had been revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord," is sung or said in unison. A family could easily make its own prayer to the Queen of Heaven, asking that the graces of Forty Days remain with them for the year.

There is a prayer by Abbot Gueranger which we like for Candlemas:

"O Blessed Mother, the sword is already in your heart. You foreknow the future of the Fruit of your womb. May our fidelity in following Him through the coming mysteries of His public life bring some alleviations to the sorrows of your maternal heart."

ENDNOTES

1. In "Family Advent Customs" the author develops these various practices; available from The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn.
2. Harcourt, Brace and Co.
3. A longer form for the Blessing of the Christmas tree is given in "Family Advent Customs" (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.)
4. Included in "The Twelve Days of Christmas Kit" published by the Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn.
5. In the Diller-Page Carol Book and Niles' Appalachian Mountain Songs respectively; both available from G. Schirmer, Inc., N.Y., or from public library music collections.
6. From "Pius X Hymnal" published by McLaughlin & Reilly, Boston.
7. The Christmas Cook Book by Zella Boutell. The Viking Press, N.Y.
8. By Harold and Eleanor Farjeon. Oxford University Press, New York.
9. From "The Christmas Cookie Book" by Virginia Pasley. Little, Brown and Company, Boston, Mass.
10. From "The Christmas Cookie Book" by Virginia Pasley. Little, Brown and Company, Boston.
11. From "Cooking for Christ" published by the National Rural Life Conference, Des Moines, Iowa.
12. "The Christmas Cook Book" by Zella Boutell, Viking Press.
13. From "The Story of the Redemption for Children" published by The Gregorian Institute of American, Toledo, Ohio.
14. From "The Pius X Hymnal" published by McLaughlin & Reilly Company, Boston, Mass.
15. Lamb molds are available at Lewis and Conger, Inc., Sixth Avenue at 45th Street, New York.