

Adult Catechism February 6 , 2017

Christ Our Pascha: The Annunciation, the Nativity of Christ, Theophany, and the Beginning of Jesus' Public Ministry

Part 1: The Incarnation of the Son of God: What is meant by the Incarnation? --

By the Incarnation is meant that the Son of God, retaining His Divine nature, took to Himself a human nature, that is, a body and soul like ours. The Incarnation is the greatest act of humility possible. By it the Son of God, eternal, almighty, infinite, voluntarily took upon Himself human nature with its weaknesses. He circumscribed Himself with a human body that would feel sickness and pain, and with a human soul that would cause Him agony. Incarnation means "becoming flesh". Thus the Son of God took a human body and soul and united it to His divine Person. Without ceasing to be God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity became man at the same time. The divine nature of Christ is from all eternity. Only His human nature began at the Incarnation. By virtue of the Incarnation Jesus Christ came to earth. This is a mystery which we can never fully understand, but must be content to honor and adore.

"The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Christ as man was like us in all things except sin. He could not sin, because He is God. But in all other things He was like us: he had a human body, a human soul, a human will. Can we understand this with our reason? Hardly. As St. John Chrysostom said: "I know that the Son of God became man. but how, I do not know." God, Who produced the universe from nothing, also caused the Incarnation.

How was the Son of God made man? --The Son of God was conceived and made man by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Three persons of God cooperated in the Incarnation, but only the Second Person took on flesh: only He took to Himself a human nature. The Incarnation is peculiarly the work of the Blessed Trinity. They formed a human soul and a human body, and these they united to the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity: the result was Our Lord Jesus Christ, God-Man. To the power of the Holy Spirit we attribute the Incarnation, because the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity peculiarly expresses the Spirit of Love: and the Incarnation is the supreme example of God's love for men. It was fitting that God the Son should become incarnate, rather than the Father or the Holy Spirit; for the Son proceeds from the Father, and could be sent by Him. God the Son then could, as the fruit of His Redemption, send God the Holy Spirit. Thus through the Son of God we became adopted sons of God.

Part 2: The Annunciation When was the Son of God conceived and made man? --The Son of God was conceived and made man on Annunciation Day, the day on which the Angel Gabriel announced to the Blessed Virgin Mary that she was to be the Mother of God. In Nazareth of Galilee lived the Blessed Virgin Mary. One day the Archangel Gabriel appeared to her and said: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women" (Luke 1:28). Mary was surprised. The angel said: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son: and thou shalt call His name Jesus." This event is called the Annunciation commemorated by the feast on

March 25. Mary knew that the angel was sent by God. She answered: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38) At these words of the Blessed Virgin, Jesus Christ became man in her womb, and the incarnation was accomplished.

Did Jesus Christ have human parents? --Jesus Christ had a human mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, but He had no human father. The Blessed Virgin was Christ's mother as man, but not as God.

However, the Blessed virgin is truly the Mother of God, because the humanity and divinity of her Son are inseparable. In a similar way we call our parents mother and father, although they only gave us our body, and not our soul. Christ had no human father. The Blessed Virgin remained a virgin all her life. The conception of Our Lord is a great miracle and a mystery that we cannot understand. We can only accept it as true on the word of God, Who is almighty.

St. Joseph was the legal spouse of Mary, but both of them preserved their virginity, consecrating it to God. They always lived together as brother and sister. St. Joseph was only the guardian or foster father of Our Lord. We should honor and love Saint Joseph, because Our Lord honored and loved him. Holy Scripture calls him a just man. He was a most pure man; and this is why God selected him as the virgin spouse of Mary, to care for her and the Child Jesus. Jesus loved St. Joseph and obeyed his slightest wish. Mary even called Joseph the father of Jesus.

It seems that Saint Joseph was born in Bethlehem of Judea. But at the time of the Annunciation, he and Mary were living in Nazareth of Galilee. He was a carpenter. It appears that he died before the beginning of Christ's public life. The memory of Saint Joseph was venerated from the very earliest centuries. In 1870 Pope Pius IX declared Saint Joseph Patron of the Church. He is also patron of a happy death. We should invoke his protection often. Taken from <http://www.catholicbook.com/AgredaCD/MyCatholicFaith/mcfc030.htm>

Part 3: The Nativity of Jesus Christ: When was Christ born? --Christ was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Christmas Day, in Bethlehem, more than two thousand years ago. When Jesus Christ was born, the Jews were no longer independent. In 64 B.C. Pompey reduced their kingdom and subjected it to Rome. Because the Jews were always plotting rebellion against Rome, the Jewish king was replaced by Herod, a Gentile, the first non-Jew to become king. Thus the scepter was "taken away from Juda", and the time predicted for the Messiah had arrived.

Today we reckon dates from the birth of Christ. This has been the continuous custom since the time of Charlemagne, although many rulers from the 5th century had adopted the practice. However, there is an error of some four to six years. Generally, it is supposed, as a matter of historical fact, that Christ was born 7-5 B.C. An error in the calculation of dates in later centuries produced this anomaly.

Bethlehem is a little town in Judea, near the city of Jerusalem. Joseph and Mary went there in obedience to the Emperor at Rome, who had commanded all his subjects to register in the towns of their ancestors. Joseph and Mary were both descended from King David, whose city was Bethlehem; this is why they went to register there. They tried to find a place to stay in even for only a night, but could find refuge nowhere. And so they sought shelter in a poor stable;

there Jesus was born. Jesus was born in a stable, a poor place. He preferred poverty and humiliation in order to suffer more for us. He wished to show Himself a friend of the poor, and to teach that the best way to heaven is through humility, and detachment from worldly goods. The Church celebrates the Nativity on December 25. The feast is called Christmas. The word "Christmas" comes from Christ and Mass. The feast is so called because on that day the Mass commemorating the birth of Christ is said.

An angel appeared to shepherds and told them of the Nativity. A star led three Magi (Wise Men) to Bethlehem. The shepherds represented the poor. The Magi represented the rich. All offered their gifts to the Infant Jesus. Our Lord does not look at the price of our gifts, but at the purity of our hearts. In the persons of the Magi, who were not Jews, Our Lord was manifested to all nations of the earth, who were at the time lost in paganism. With the Magi, we are called to the Truth; the Old Testament was ended, and the world had entered upon a new Covenant with God. And if, like the Magi we offer Jesus Christ the gold of our love, the myrrh of self-sacrifice, and the incense of our prayers, we too shall be united with God. Many churches and homes set up a crib at Christmas. This custom, although of very ancient origin, was popularized by St. Francis of Assisi.

Most homes also set up a decorated Christmas tree. It is a reminder of the tree of the cross. The boxes of Christmas gifts remind us of the great Gift that God sent us. Santa Claus, the jolly and beloved distributor of Christmas gifts, is an American adoption of St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, of the fourth century. This Saint is popular in Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, where he is made the secret purveyor of gifts to children on December 6, his feast day. The custom was brought to New York by the Dutch, quickly spread throughout the United States and became absorbed into the Christmas celebration.

What incidents in Our Lord's life were closely connected with the Nativity? --The following incidents in Our Lord's life were closely connected with the Nativity: the Circumcision, the Presentation, and the flight to Egypt.

The Child received the name Jesus when He was eight days old. He was circumcised, according to the custom of the Jews. At the Circumcision Jesus began His role of Mediator between God and man, shedding His blood for the first time for us. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for He shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). "Therefore God . . . has bestowed upon him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bend, of those in heaven, on earth, and under the earth" (Phil. 2:9,10). "If you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you" (John 16:23). The feast of the Circumcision is celebrated on New Year's Day. Thus the Church teaches us to begin everything in the name of Jesus.

When Jesus was forty days old, His Mother presented Him in the Temple at Jerusalem. In imitation, though the rite is essentially different, mothers today after childbirth seek the blessing of the Church in a thanksgiving ceremony called "churching". The feast of the Presentation is celebrated on February 2. It is also called the purification of the Blessed Virgin, or Candlemas Day. On this day candles are blessed and carried in procession, in memory of the words of holy Simeon, when Jesus was presented in the Temple. He said Our Lord was "a Light of revelation to the Gentiles".

Mary and Joseph took the Child Jesus to Egypt to save Him from King Herod, who wanted to kill Him. An angel appeared to Joseph and told him to take the Child Jesus and His mother away to Egypt. They stayed in Egypt until the death of King Herod. Then an angel appeared to Joseph and bade him return to the land of the Jews. Taken from <http://www.catholicbook.com/AgredaCD/MyCatholicFaith/mcfc031.htm>

Part 4: The Theophany of Jesus Christ: When did Christ begin His public life? -- Christ began His public life when He was about thirty years old. After spending long years in obscurity and humble toil, Jesus Christ next entered upon a period of activity, going about and teaching publicly. He left His home in Nazareth, and began His public life by an act of great humility: His baptism at the hands of St. John the Baptist in the river Jordan.

The mother of St. John the Baptist was St. Elizabeth, cousin of the Blessed Virgin Mary. St. John lived a life of very rigorous penance in the desert, preparing himself for his role of forerunner or precursor of the Saviour. About two years before Christ started His public life, John the Baptist went out of the desert, and began to preach penance; he baptized in the Jordan all those who believed in his teachings and wished to begin a new life. St. John the Baptist was the forerunner or precursor of Christ. He spoke to the people of the coming Messiah, and pointed Jesus out to them as the "Lamb of God." He was put to death by Herod, because he reproved the ruler for his immoral life.

Jesus came to John to be baptized; immediately afterwards, as Our Lord came out of the river, the Holy Spirit came down upon Him in the form of a dove, and a Voice from heaven was heard saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17).

In the earliest days of the Church, Christians celebrated the manifestations of Christ in the world, the birth, the visit of the three Magi, and the baptism on January 6. This replaced the winter solstice. Instead of worshiping the sun, we worship Christ the Sun of Righteousness. At the beginning of the 4th century, the solstice was brought forward to December 25th and the Church brought forward the birth of Jesus to that date by 354 A.D. in Rome.

In the Western Church, Epiphany means the manifestation of Christ to the world. Jesus was visited by the Magi who followed a star to find Him. They represent the Gentiles. Theophany is the word used in the Eastern Church because the baptism is the manifestation of God, of the Holy Trinity. God the Father spoke, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). The Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed these words as true, as Jesus came up from the waters of the Jordan River.

One of the verses of the Feast of Theophany is "Light of Light, Christ our God, God made manifest, has shone upon the world. O people, let us worship Him." In the Gospel of John, Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the Light of the world.

This great feast, like the Nativity of the Lord, has a fore-feast. All creation, especially the river Jordan in the deep cleft of the earth, is summoned to be ready to receive its Creator who comes in humility to be baptized by the Forerunner, so that all of humanity may be saved.

Our life on earth is especially dependent upon water and light. Water covers most of the earth and interacts with the entire cycle of nature to help things grow. In a comparable way, light is essential to photosynthesis, the miracle behind everything that is green. It causes creative changes in the atmosphere and on the surface of the earth. Light allows us to appreciate nature's rich colours. And these two elements—water and light—are the chief symbols for the Feast of Theophany.

One of the greatest feasts of the Eastern Church is Theophany or Epiphany. In the Byzantine Ukrainian Catholic Church, we celebrate this feast on the eve of Theophany (January 5) and on January 6. A whole series of traditions practiced by Ukrainians for many centuries are linked with this major feast day. First and foremost among the traditions is the Solemn Blessing of Holy Water. Wherever circumstances permit, this solemn blessing of water takes place by a river, lake, or pond. However, if none of these are near, the liturgical rites of the blessing are held in church. This blessing commemorates our Lord's baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River when the Blessed Trinity was revealed to the people for the first time. As Jesus was standing in the water, the Holy Spirit in the appearance of a dove was seen above Him, while the voice of God the Father was heard to say, "This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased!"

During the ceremony the incensing of the water signifies the descent of the Holy Spirit. The three candles that are immersed and snuffed out in the water, remind us that through Christ's baptism our sins are destroyed and forgiven. The many benefits we derive from holy water are suitably expressed in the inspiring prayers of the blessing itself. In these prayers, the priest asks God to endow the water with the power to sanctify us, to forgive sins, to cure the sick, to purify the souls and bodies of those who draw and drink this water, to alleviate their suffering, to sanctify their homes and to protect them from the incursions of the devil and from other afflictions. It is for this reason that the faithful take this holy water home. It is fitting and right to have the home blessed by a priest or deacon. However, the head of the household can sprinkle all the rooms in the home as well as the surrounding yard. The remaining water is kept for future use.

Among its many uses, holy water may be used to bless oneself or others before undertaking a long journey, or we may bless our children with it before putting them to bed to protect them from possible harm. Sick people may drink some of the holy water or be sprinkled with it, humbly asking God for the grace of recovery. In times of grave temptation or family difficulties and afflictions, the use of holy water often brings strength and consolation.

It is evident, therefore, that in many events in our lives, holy water, as a sign and petition for God's grace, can be very beneficial if taken and used with God's assistance. Taken from <http://www.skeparchy.org/wordpress/resources/feast-day-information/feast-of-theophany/>

Part 5 :Jesus' Public Ministry After His baptism, Jesus went into the desert, where He fasted forty days and forty nights. This teaches us to look upon baptism as a call to penance, and to prepare for all kinds of activity by mortification and prayer. The forty days of Lent are intended to commemorate the forty days' fast of Our Lord.

After Our Lord's long fast, the devil was permitted to tempt Him. Christ rebuked the devil, and angels came to minister to Him. From this temptation of Our Lord we know that a temptation is not sinful. As long as we resist the devil, we are pleasing to God, however strong may be the temptation that assails us. "God is faithful and will not permit you to be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also give you a way out that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor.10:13).

How long did Christ's public life last? --Christ's public life lasted about three years, during which He went about preaching, teaching, and doing good. Upon His return from His forty-day fast in the desert, Jesus called His first disciples. In a few days He performed His first miracle, changing water into wine at a marriage-feast in Cana, at the request of His Mother, although, as He told her, His time had not yet come.

Among the outstanding works of Jesus during the first year of His active life were: He drove sellers out of the Temple, saying they made it a "den of thieves". He cured the ruler's son, Peter's mother-in-law, the paralytic at the pool, the daughter of Jairus. He calmed the tempest. Jesus began the second year of His public life by an act of utmost significance: He chose from the many that followed Him, "the Twelve", His twelve Apostles, Himself calling them Apostles. In the Sermon on the Mount He summarized His teachings; it is the law of love taking the place of the law of fear.

During the second year of His mission, Christ performed many miracles, among which were: the cure of the centurion's servant, of the widow's son at Naim; the first multiplication of the loaves; He walked on the water, and bade Peter walk on it, too. He forgave Mary Magdalen, and sent the Apostles on their mission. He began teaching in the form of parables, comparing what He wanted to teach with common things. Among His parables of this period were: the sower, the tares and wheat, the mustard seed, the pearl of great price. In His third year of teaching, Jesus went to Galilee and Phoenicia, because in Judea where He had been teaching, the Pharisees for envy and jealousy sought to kill Him. In Phoenicia He gave in to the entreaties of a Gentile, a Canaanite, who persevered in asking Him to cure her daughter.

In Galilee Jesus cured a deaf-and-dumb man, using signs that the Church has adopted in its baptismal ceremonies; he performed the miracle of the second multiplication of the loaves. On Mount Tabor He was transfigured in the presence of Peter, James, and John. Among other cures were those of the ten lepers, and the man blind from birth. He promised the primacy over all to Peter, paid the tribute to Caesar, forgave the woman caught in adultery, sent out his seventy-two disciples on a mission, called the rich young man, instructed Mary and Martha, and was the guest of Zaccheus. He told the parables of the unmerciful servant, the Good Samaritan, the lost sheep, the lost goat, the greater supper, the unjust steward, the prodigal son, Dives and Lazarus, the Pharisee and the publican, the laborers in the vineyard.

Finally, at the end of His public life, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. By this time the envy of the Pharisees was so great that they determined to bring about the death of Jesus; Judas came as a ready tool.

Magdalen anointed Our Lord, as He said, for His burial. He entered Jerusalem in triumph riding on an ass, with children waving palms and singing. He told the parable of the husbandmen and the heir, to show the Pharisees that He knew of their designs against Him. And last of all, He ate the Last Supper with His Apostles, there instituting the Holy Eucharist.

What was Christ's aim in His public life? --Christ's aim in His public life was to teach what God requires all to believe and practice, so that all may enter the kingdom of heaven. For this purpose He gathered some seventy-two disciples, and from them chose twelve Apostles, to whom He gave special instruction and training. By them He established His Church, which was to carry on His work after His death, to continue teaching what He had openly and publicly taught.

He spoke to large crowds, sometimes numbering four or five thousand people, as when He multiplied the loaves and fishes. Christ taught in the simplest manner, so that all might understand without difficulty. He used plain, homely words. He often used signs and parables, and illustrated His meaning by examples from nature and common life. In the doctrines He taught, a leading idea is: "Seek first the kingdom of God." He taught a new rule of faith, and gave new commandments. He taught the precept of love, even for our enemies. He revealed certain mysteries: such as those of the Blessed Trinity, of His own divinity, of the Last judgment. He instituted the seven sacraments. Taken from <http://www.catholicbook.com/AgredaCD/MyCatholicFaith/mcfc033.htm>