

Faith-Filled  
Family Rituals  
*for All*  
Seasons

BLESSINGS, ACTIVITIES  
*and* PRAYERS

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**The Importance  
of Ritual in  
the Family.....3**

**Rituals  
for Advent .....5**

**Rituals for  
the Christmas  
Season.....7**

**Rituals  
for Lent .....9**

**Rituals for  
the Triduum... 11**

**Rituals for  
the Easter  
Season.....13**

**Rituals for  
Ordinary  
Time .....15**

**Rituals  
for Secular  
Holidays ..... 18**

**Rituals for  
Every Day .....22**

**Rituals for  
Times of  
Difficulty,  
Hurt, or Loss..25**

**Rituals of  
Blessing.....29**

# The Importance of **Ritual in the Family**

**R**ituals have a way of bonding us. They build identity, provide a sense of stability, and offer hope during tumultuous times. Rituals provide healing and connect us with our past. The regular practice of ritual enriches its meaning and increases its value. The recurring nature of a family ritual has significance, not just because it is comforting, but also because it says something about being part of a family. When woven with prayer, rituals become a vital way of recognizing the presence of God in the midst of family life.

A ritual is a patterned way of doing something that involves words, symbols, or gestures. Grand rituals, such as the

preparation and sharing of a Thanksgiving dinner, involve particular foods, colors, seasonal décor, and ordering of events. Who sits where at the table? How is the food prepared and shared? What happens before and after the meal? Such questions point to the pattern involved in such a ritual and the elements that surround it. These stem from tradition and take on greater meaning every time they are repeated. Each person knows his or her “role,” and so the actions, words, gestures, and symbols don’t need to be explained. We *know* through the ritual what Thanksgiving is all about.

Smaller rituals are carried out in the context of daily life. Consider the manner in which you get up in the morning and how you order the first movements of the day, such as showering, dressing, greeting others, and eating breakfast. In many instances, such activities are simply routine. When these actions take on a sense of purpose, however, they become more ritualistic. Savoring the first sip of coffee or the feel of a hot shower, for example, can be celebratory actions. This is why the disruption of an everyday ritual can be so unsettling.

This booklet offers ideas for creating or enhancing rituals and offering prayer in the home throughout the liturgical and natural seasons of the year as well as part of everyday routines, family events, and times of loss. These build and strengthen a recognition of God’s presence within the movement of family life. As such, they can be tailored to meet your family’s circumstances, needs, interests, time, and space. As you celebrate rituals together, may you find the grace that unfolds with being a family, held in all time through God’s love and grace.

# RITUALS FOR **Advent**



Advent, the four weeks (counted by Sundays) prior to Christmas, is a season of preparation, waiting, and anticipation for the festival celebration of Christ's birth in history as well as his coming at the end of the world. Occurring in the northern hemisphere along with the winter solstice, the season also tracks the movement out of darkness and into light. It is a busy time of year for families as well as one rich in customs and traditions.

## **Advent Wreath**

The Advent wreath consists of four candles—three purple and one pink—set within a circle of evergreen branches. Set aside time each Sunday of Advent to light another candle (the pink candle is for the third week, Gaudete [Joy] Sunday) until all four are lit. Pause to let the light fill the space and then offer a simple prayer: “Jesus, let your light fill our home. Give us loving and joyful hearts as we await your coming. Amen.” Extend the ritual by lighting the wreath each weekday prior to dinner or before going to bed.

## **Blessing of the Christmas Tree**

Decorating the Christmas tree, which many families do during Advent, is a wonderful opportunity for storytelling. As ornaments are hung on the branches, memories and associations often arise around their origins. Savor this time by turning off the television and electronic devices and focusing on your time together. When you're finished decorating, offer a short prayer of blessing for your tree.

## *Other Ideas for Blessings*

- Bless the stockings as you hang them in place.
- Bless the ingredients for Christmas meals.
- Bless the rooms where houseguests will be sleeping.



## **Setting up a Crèche**

The tradition of recreating the nativity scene, or crèche, began with Saint Francis of Assisi, who used people and live animals to re-create the night of Jesus' birth. Strengthen the connection between Christmas and the Nativity by recalling each figure's role in the scene. Read aloud from the first and second chapters of Luke's Gospel about the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus, and the visit of the shepherds. End by singing or listening to a favorite Christmas carol together. To emphasize Advent's theme of anticipation, wait until Christmas Eve to place the figure of Jesus in the scene.

RITUALS FOR THE

# Christmas Season

Christmas is both a Solemnity and a liturgical season. It begins with the evening celebration of Mass on Christmas Eve and ends with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord on the Sunday after Epiphany. The season of Christmas celebrates the gift of Jesus' birth and the proximity of God's love. Each day calls us to rejoice in the mystery of the Incarnation, the coming of the Word made flesh to us.

## **The Feast of the Holy Family**

The Feast of the Holy Family honors the love shared by Jesus, Mary, and Joseph and the way in which they serve as a model for all families. It is celebrated on the Sunday between Christmas Day and New Year's Day. (If both of those occur on a Sunday, the feast is celebrated

on December 30.) To celebrate the love of the Holy Family, place one

or more photos of your family

in a space where everyone

can see them. Take turns

naming ways your family

cares for each other

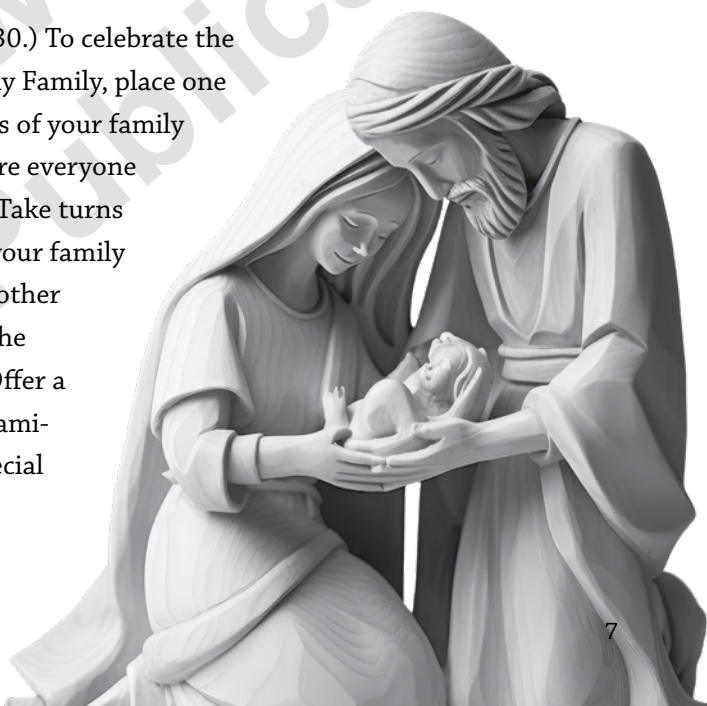
in the way of the

Holy Family. Offer a

prayer for all fami-

lies on this special

feast day.



## An Epiphany Blessing for the Home

The Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord is celebrated on the Sunday after January 1. It marks the visit of the Magi, often depicted as the three kings, who come to pay homage to Jesus. At Epiphany, the church celebrates the manifestation of the Son of God as the Savior and Messiah.

A blessing of the home also marks the beginning of a new year. A time-honored way of doing this is by writing “C M B” (the traditional initials of the three wise men: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar) with chalk above the entrance to your home and other doorways. These letters also represent the Latin blessing “*Christus mansionem benedicat*”: “May Christ bless this house.” The letters are placed between the numbers of the year in which the blessing is offered, preceded and followed by a “+”. For example, for the year 2024, write: +20 C M B 24+. Create a simple ritual of blessing by starting with the Sign of the Cross and reading the account of the Magi’s visit to the Christ child (Matthew 2:1–12). Then move from the entrance of your home to other doors you wish to mark with the chalk blessing. Conclude by offering the Our Father together.

