### LSW

children

CUSTOMS IN CHRISTMAS

We celebrate Christmas in church with two masses.  The Christmas midnight mass is a vigil mass, similar in structure to a normal Sunday mass (unlike Easter, the other midnight mass), followed by Christmas Day mass, which is a different mass the next morning.

The traditional colours of Christmas are gold (for the gift of the Magi), red (the blood of Jesus on the cross) and green (eternal life of Jesus that the cross cannot conquer).

The first Christmas crib was credited to St Francis of Assisi, who wanted to emphasise the focus of Christ rather than the secular merry-making and gifts-giving (Even in his days!!).  He first used real people & animals and the whole scene was blessed by the Pope but now, of course, we use little statues.  The Christmas crib in church is blessed at Christmas midnight mass.  Oh, by the way, there is no three kings, or even three wise men.  The Bible mentioned *some men*, and the number and their crowns got added later on.  They were likely astrologers who were watching the stars when they saw the new star over Bethlehem.

Christmas hymns in Latin have been around ever since Christmas started but Christmas carols in local language, was popularised by St Francis of Assisi (again).  *Carol* comes from the old French word, *carole*, which is a dance: Carols were originally performed as a dance-song.

We use holly as a Christmas decoration.  Its prickly points symbolises Jesus' crown of thorns and the red berries the blood from that crown.  Both the holly and mistletoe are of pagan origins but I can't think of any Christian significance for the mistletoe.

Christmas trees were popularised by Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria, who tried to recreate the twinkling of stars through the branches of evergreen trees with Christmas tree lights (with candles!!).  The evergreens symbolise life that winter cannot kill off.

And Boxing Day, celebrated on Dec 26 in UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, do not have anything to do with boxing or fighting.  Boxes probably refer to gifts in boxes given to employees and slaves, effectively the Christmas bonus.

Year A

**Fourth Sunday in Advent**

**Images**

Trusting God

**Points to note**

There are two accounts of Jesus’ birth in the Gospels. The one in Mt (this year) tells it from Joseph’s point of view while the one in Lk tells it from Mary’s point of view. To understand Joseph’s point of view, one need to know that Jewish marriage takes place in two stages. In the first stage, where Joseph and Mary’s marriage was at the time Jesus was conceived, the husband and wife are betrothed but do not stay together as husband and wife until the second stage a year later. So, for the first year of the marriage, the Jewish wife remains a virgin.

Now, how do you explain this to children who may not have that birds and bees chat with their parents yet? Maybe, better to focus on the role of Joseph in his part of the Holy Family and him taking the second place to Mary. To me, his acquiescence to his part in our salvation in no less than Mary but his humility in deferring to Mary’s role is something to emulate.

**Liturgy**

Acclamation before the Gospel

Alleluia, alleluia!

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son

and they will call him Emmanuel,

a name which means ‘God-is-with-us’.

Alleluia!

Gospel

*Discuss with the children about the Christmas season that we are about to enter in the coming week. This is available in the end panel of this leaflet & for a more complete explanation, at* [*http://childrenlivingthesundayword.blogspot.com/2013/09/soundbites-about-advent-christmas.html*](http://childrenlivingthesundayword.blogspot.com/2013/09/soundbites-about-advent-christmas.html)*.*

The Lord be with you.

*All:*  And also with your spirit.

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to St Matthew

*All:*  Glory to you O Lord

(Mt 1:18-24)

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph; being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.’ Now all this took place to fulfill the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

*The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel,* a name which means ‘God-is-with-us.’

When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

This is the Good News of the Lord

**Dialogue**

*This discussion could be kept short as the bulk of the discussions takes place before the reading.*

Who is Jesus’ mother? Mary is the mother of Jesus.

Who is Jesus’ father? No, not Joseph, but God.

Yet, Joseph is part of the Holy Family. So, who is Joseph to Jesus? *Explain that Joseph was Jesus’ foster father. Explain what a foster father is. Explain similarities and differences with stepfathers, if children are more familiar with the latter.*

*Explain that while Joseph is the foster father, not stepfather of Jesus, Mary as the mother of Jesus was the more important parent. Joseph was there in the supporting role.*

*Discuss how Joseph must have felt when told by the angel in the dream that he is to become a foster father. How did Joseph take it?* Did he accept the task that God gave him? Why?  *Like Mary, he trusted God. Discuss what the angel told him. And as a Jew, how he is to fulfil the scripture prophecy in the reading.* According to the reading, did he even hesitate?

Did Joseph carry out his task well? Would that be a difficult job?To take care of a child that was not his son?

*Discuss how the children would respond if they were asked to do a difficult job. Discuss further if they were asked to take the supporting role in doing that job and someone else had the leading role. Maybe an example would be a supporting role in a play, a team game or something more important: building something that benefits someone elseor looking after someone.*

*Discuss how trusting God would help them as it has helped Joseph.*