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I'M DREAMING OF BEAUTIFUL ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS MUSIC

BY JENNIFER GREGORY MILLER

THE "CHRISTMAS SHOPPING SEASON" begins earlier every year. There is a constant onslaught to the senses by the "Holiday Spirit", including decorations and songs.

Every year while I'm shopping in stores I remember how much I dislike piped-in Christmas carols, particularly if it's before Thanksgiving. I shouldn't even use the term "carols" because traditionally Christmas carols focus on the celebration of the birth of Jesus at Christmas or "Christ-Mass". The more accurate term of what is generally played in stores is Christmas songs, encompassing secular themes, such as Santa, Rudolf, winter scenes, family fun, being jolly, decking halls, and getting everything one wants.

The other trouble with canned music is that most are pop artist renditions, which tend to be solo songs, not sing-along songs.

While I'm not opposed to Christmas carols in general before Christmas, I am against being held captive by what is I shall call "P.C. Holiday Listening" (P.C. standing for "Politically Correct," for my non-American readers). P.C. Holiday Listening strips the True Meaning of Christmas and leaves a completely secular and materialistic holiday.

My intentional plan to counteract the P.C. Holiday Listening for Advent and Christmas will be choosing music that is good, true, and beautiful. During family listening times (home and car), I am

Continued on page i

Discover the Beauty of Truth

“By studying and discussing the great books you learn how to think for yourself and how to come to your own conclusions — how to discover the truth. And it’s tremendously satisfying.”

Brian Murphy ('14)
Cheshire, Conn.



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From the Editor...

Dear Reader,

Welcome to our last issue! It's been a great six years, and I regret that we have to stop production. Thank you for all your support over the years.

A special thank you to the contributing editors and various authors we've featured over the year. Thanks to our copy editor of many years Rose Decaen for helping us make the jump to a more professional publication. Thanks to our web designer Michelle Grunkemeyer for being willing to do so much for so little. And especially special thanks to our art director, Ted Schluenderfritz, and his crew for making the magazine such a work of art. May God reward you all for your efforts.

Now we turn to Advent.

Hark! a herald voice is calling:
'Christ is nigh,' it seems to say;
'Cast away the dreams of darkness,
O ye children of the day!'

Startled at the solemn warning,
Let the earth-bound soul arise;
Christ, her Sun, all sloth dispelling,
Shines upon the morning skies.

—EDWARD CASWELL

In this issue we talk about Advent, Christmas, and humility. Our reviews include some suggestions from our editors for Christmas giving.

We wish you a lovely and fruitful Advent and a joy-filled Christmas!

In Christ,
Margot
Editor



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going to be extremely selective.

In addition, I want to make a clear distinction between Advent and Christmas. In our domestic church I make a point of contrasting the liturgical seasons. It is not Christmas until December 25, and this Christmas season remains Christmas until January 12th. And Advent is the time of preparation for Christ's Birth. There is a definite difference between preparation and celebration!

I find my musical choices are more on the traditional or classical side, many being calm and peaceful tunes. I think I unconsciously wield a counterattack on the P.C. Holiday Listening and the Holiday Frenzy that ensues during this time of year choosing music that will "soothe the savage beast."

OUR SIMPLE ADVENT
MUSIC PLAN:

- ☞ Emphasize more Advent chants and hymns to sing and to hear during the Advent season. We are striving to echo and meditate on the Church's Advent Liturgy in our domestic church.
- ☞ Delay playing Christmas carols until closer to Christmas. (We generally start the Christmas carols around the 3rd Sunday of Advent when we decorate the Christmas tree.)
- ☞ The Christmas carols and music will be deliberate, beautiful choices.

I'm still working with the old-fashioned stereo, using CDs and records. I do transfer many into files for my .mp3 player on my iPhone, and I can play them through my computer, but I prefer



St. Pierre Solesmes Abbey



the stereo for family listening. Yet, with the .mp3 technology, it is so easy (and less expensive) to come up with an Advent playlist for the family. There is very little excuse to not have Advent music playing in the home. In the car, if I do not have any Advent CDs available, I play the classical radio station, which plays choral and classical Christmas music.

Beginning my focus with the Advent liturgy, I first start with the Sunday Introits or the Entrance Antiphon. The Sunday liturgy lays down the theme for the week. While there can be different Introits throughout the week, repeating the Sunday's Introit reinforces that theme. And listening to the different chants will bring my family into the spirit of the Liturgy with the corresponding liturgical season. We may not be able to sing along, but the tunes and words become familiar.

The Introit is the Entrance Antiphon of the Mass, part of the propers of the Mass. These are found both in the

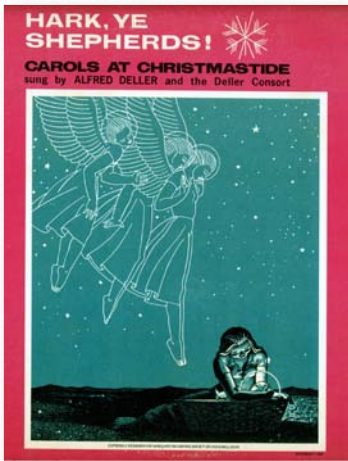
Ordinary and Extraordinary Form of the Mass. Traditionally the Sunday Mass was titled by the first words of the Introit. While there are other propers, I think just playing Advent Sunday Introits throughout the week would help gain the familiarity of the liturgy, and also keep Sundays the focal point. I've included the text and translation of the four introits from the Third Roman Missal below.

.....
FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT:

Missa Ad Te Levavi

Introit: To you, I lift up my soul, O my God. In you, I have trusted; let me not be put to shame. Nor let my enemies exult over me; and let none who hope in you be put to shame. (Cf. Psalm 25:1-3)

Ad te levávi ánimam meam: Deus meus in te confído, non erubéscam. Necque irrídeant me inimíci mei, étenim univérsi qui te expéctant, non confundéntur.



.....
SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT:

Missa Populus Sion

Introit: O people of Sion, behold, the Lord will come to save the nations, and the Lord will make the glory of his voice heard in the joy of your heart. (Cf Is 30:19, 30)

Populus Sion, ecce Dominus véniet ad salvandas gentes; et audítam fáciét Dóminus glóriam vocis suae in laetítia cordis vestry.

.....
**THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
 (GAUDETE SUNDAY):**

Missa Gaudete

Introit: Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near. (Cf. Philippians 4:4-5)

Gaudéte in Dómino semper: íterum dico, gaudéte. Dóminus enim prope est.

.....
FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT:

Missa Rorate Coeli

Introit: Drop down dew from above, you heavens, and let the clouds rain down the Just One; let the earth be opened and bring forth a Savior. (Cf.

Is 45:8)

Roráte, caeli, désuper, et nubes pluant iustum; aperiátur terra et gérmínet Salvatórem.

It is more difficult to find CDs that only contain Advent Mass Propers. I have found a few that to play in the background at home. There are also many different YouTube recordings of the various introits and also various online recordings of the chants.

.....
**FOR ADVENT HYMNS, HERE IS
 MY SHORT LIST OF FAVORITES.**

☞ Veni, Veni, Emmanuel (O Come, O Come, Emmanuel)

☞ Rorate Caeli (Drop Down Dew)

☞ Creator alme siderum (Creator of the Stars at Night)

☞ Alma Redemptoris Mater (Sweet Mother of the Redeemer)

☞ People Look East

☞ On Jordan's Bank

☞ O Come Divine Messiah

☞ Saviour of the Nations, Come

☞ Lo, How a Rose 'Er Blooming

☞ Gabriel's Message (The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came)

☞ Like the Dawning of the Morning (Our Lady's Expectation)

There are different times we sing these during Advent. We sing the refrain of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" as we light the candles on the Advent Wreath before our dinner meal. During the O Antiphon Days we add the verse that applies for that O Antiphon of the day.

Before bedtime after prayers, I

usually have a hymn or chant we try to sing. My sons have memorized “People Look East” from previous Advents. This year “Creator alme Siderum” and “Rorate Caeli” are the planned hymns. I’m not aiming for perfection with words, but familiarity with the tunes.

Since the Christmas season extends until January 12, we’re not at a loss for time to enjoy our favorite Christmas records and CDs. We do compromise and play some Christmas carols before Christmas, but wait until Gaudete Sunday, when liturgically we are given a glimpse that Christmas is near. Everyone’s taste is individual in music. Some of our favorite CDs are by the Cambridge Singers, Deller Consort, the Chieftains, the Trapp Family Singers, Notre Dame Glee Club, and a bit of Bing Crosby. I also play versions of the Nutcracker Suite and Handel’s Messiah and lots of Christmas chant.

If you were to ask me my ultimate favorite CD it would be by the Deller Consort, Hark Ye Shepherds. (It is available at this website: <http://tinyurl.com/deller-mm>.) In addition, the fabulous collection Complete Vanguard Classics: Music For The Christmas Season, Christmas Carols and Motets, by Alfred Deller and the Deller Consort has been reissued which includes the Hark Ye Shepherds. Ask any of my six siblings—we love the Deller version of People Look East. No other version surpasses this one!

Since our family will naturally be listening to music during this time of year, I am just redirecting the choices when I can. This doesn’t mean that my sons will never hear or sing Feliz Navidad or Rudolph or Frosty, but it does mean that their Advent and Christmas repertoire is expanded and they will have beautiful

tunes engraved in their hearts.

May your Advent and Christmas seasons be filled with beautiful music to help raise your hearts to God.

.....
RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:


For the Advent Chant

By the Monks of Solesmes, the four Sundays of Advent, Abbaye Solesmes-L’avent (Les 4 Messes). Available on Amazon.

Gregorian Advent by CantArte Regensburg & Hubert Velten. This is my least favorite recording merely because the interpretation of the chant is different than I prefer, but it contains all the Introsits.

Gregorian Chant for the Church Year: Advent / Veni Domine by Schola of the Hofburgkapelle of Vienna, directed by Fr. Hubert Dopf, S.J. It contains all four Advent Sunday Masses, just three O Antiphons and hymn Conditor alme siderum. Performed by men who were former Vienna Choirboys. I’m including for either used copies or on iTunes.

For Advent Listening

For Advent hymns and music, the new CD Advent at Ephesus by the Benedictines of Mary Queen of Apostles contains most of my short list of favorites and then even more. It’s the compilation I have been looking for years—all Advent hymns on one CD and sung so beautifully! I highly recommend it! 

Jennifer Gergory Miller is a homeschooling mother of two boys living in Virginia. Her blog “Family in Feast and Feria” can be found at <http://familyfeastandferia.wordpress.com/> An Anxious Waiting



ADVENT PICTURE STUDY

BY MARY ELLEN BARRETT

“The apologetics of beauty is winning people to Christ and His Church through the showing forth of the beauty of God’s Creation, very often through works of sub-creation, such as literature, the visual arts, music and architecture.” – JOSEPH PEARCE (*Crisis Magazine* Interview, August 2012)

THIS IS A WORLD THAT IS PARTICULARLY DEVOID OF THE kind of uplifting beauty Pearce has in mind when he is speaking to the interviewer at *Crisis Magazine*. That is why it is so important, as home educators, to keep beauty alive by educating our children about the Church’s great history in art and artistic endeavors. Advent is an excellent time in which to start introducing your children to great art because

so many of the images of the Advent season will already be familiar to them in a general way.

Art Appreciation should certainly be part of everyone’s education but it can present difficulties to the non-artsy homeschool mother. This is why picture study, as described by educator, Charlotte Mason, is a gentle and inviting way to incorporate art while not being in any way overwhelming.

Picture study consists of selecting a few pictures selected by mother to display and discuss. First the picture is laid on the table and all the children are invited to spend several minutes in quiet contemplation of the picture. Ask them to study details and commit the picture to memory as best they can. When time has elapsed, remove the picture and then ask each child to describe what they saw. As they describe draw a few lines on a black or white board or a large piece of paper. For example if there is a tree ask where;

foreground or background and mom can draw a simple tree shape.

This continues until there is a rough sketch representing the picture. Do this for a few days while also allowing the



children to learn a few facts about the artist. I find a beforehand trip to the library helps mom immensely with picture study. Take out one of those big art books and spend some time choosing a picture and learning a bit about the artist and the time period. At the end of the study the children should reproduce the picture with great attention to detail. The idea of picture study is more that the students learn to appreciate the artwork rather than become artists themselves.

A wonderful way to experience Advent more fully in your homeschool is to pick one picture a week for the four weeks and do a mini picture study with the children focusing on artwork that has an Advent theme. I say mini picture study because it is usual to spend several weeks discovering one piece of art and since Advent is only about four weeks it is necessary to abbreviate the process a bit.

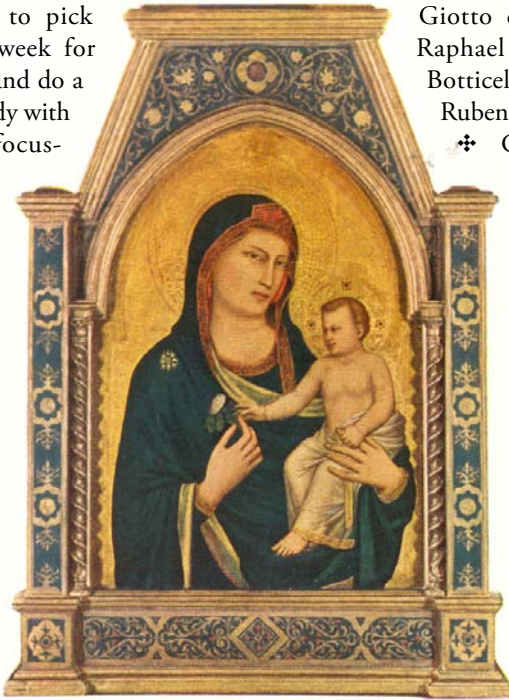
You could pick one particular theme for four different paintings, for example Renaissance Nativity scenes, of which there are many, or you could take a different theme each week; one week the Annunciation, one on the Nativity, one on the Adoration of the Magi and one depicting the Adoration

of the Shepherds. You could also decide to study pictures of the different feast days in Advent such as Saint Nicholas, Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Barbara, Saint Juan Diego or images of the Immaculate Conception.

If one painting a week seems daunting then just pick one for the entire season. The important thing is to enjoy the process and help the children develop a keen eye and an appreciation for the talent and vision of the artist.

Some artists to consider for picture study:

Giotto di Bondone ❖
 Raphael ❖ Francesco
 Botticelli ❖ Peter Paul
 Rubens ❖ Carlo Dolci
 ❖ Caravaggio ❖
 Jean-Baptiste
 Jouvenet ❖
 Rembrandt
 Van Rijn



This is a just a small sample to get you started. You might need to choose an artist based upon which prints you can obtain affordably. I strongly suggest the lovely art books at your local library

as a beginning. Prints can also be ordered from The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and you can view the entire of collection of the National Gallery in London online. I have had success buying calendars depicting



religious art in chain bookstores and very often there are beautiful art books in the marked down bins in those same stores. If you begin to look you will find that there will be a lot of sources available very inexpensively. If you are willing to make a bit of an investment the Art Appreciation Set from Seton Home Study School is a beautiful addition to any home. There are three books in the hardcover set and they are very high quality and beautiful.

Advent is a time to prepare your heart, home and soul for the coming of the Savior. To add the dimension of beautiful and timeless art study can only elevate the season for your family. Pope

Benedict XVI, then Cardinal Ratzinger, wrote;

“Being struck and overcome by the beauty of Christ is a more real, more profound knowledge than mere rational deduction. Of course we must not underrate the importance of theological reflection, of exact and precise theological thought; it remains absolutely necessary. But to move from here to disdain or to reject the impact produced by the response of the heart in the encounter with beauty as a true form of knowledge would impoverish us and dry up our faith and our theology. We must rediscover this form of knowledge; it is a pressing need of our time.” (On the Contemplation of Beauty 2002)

There is a pressing need in this world that seems to celebrate the ugly for us to properly school our children in the art of appreciation and contemplation of beauty so that they may be more united with the author of all that is true and beautiful.♡



Mary Ellen is a homeschooling mother of 7 children living on Long Island. She writes for The Long Island Catholic and blogs at <http://maryellenb.typepad.com/> and is the editor for the online Advent and Christmas resource O Night Divine: http://maryellenb.typepad.com/o_night_divine/



FELIZ NATAL

A SOUTH AMERICAN CHRISTMAS REFLECTION

BY ANA BRAGA-HENEGBRY

WHenever presenting about Brazil at a school-age groups, I like to tell kids: “We always got swimsuits, and bikes, and outdoor games for Christmas!” They look at me skeptically . . . as if trying, but not succeeding, to wrap their brains around the idea. Or I’ll say, “We placed cotton balls on our live pine trees for snow balls . . .” and “we’d have pineapple, and frozen treats!”

The Christmas break, in my native Brazil, and of course in all of the southern hemisphere, coincides with the beginning of the Summer vacation. How

perfect is that? School is done and over with, and children open the summer with new summer toys and the expectation of three fun months ahead!



After almost 30 years of living on the northern hemisphere, I still think it so strange to go back to school right after the holidays, and under the worst of the annual weather to boot.

And yet, for a Catholic family, how much of Christmas is the same: the same date, the same joyful expectation, the same loving gift making and food planning. Growing up as a family of ten children in Rio, our Christmas celebrations were joyful, magical, unforgettable.

My parents were not the typical South American Catholic parents—they took their faith seriously. Christmas was *lived* in my home as I knew no home to live it. The Christmas tree didn't come up until Christmas Eve, and Midnight

Mass was a must at the chapel of the Benedictine sisters from Germany that ran our Catholic girls' school. They sang the Gregorian Chant like heavenly angels, and my brothers served the mass, full of reverence, incense, and awe.

Although we didn't exactly home-school, I like to think we were much like a homeschooled family of today. School was half-day (as it is still in most of the world) and our life was most definitely centered at

home. Also, Mother didn't believe in preschool or even Kindergarten—we were kept at home until the second grade, and she herself taught us to read and write at home, giving us all an academic edge when we entered school. But more importantly, my parents were culture

Feliz Natal, Feliz Natal, Feliz Natal . . . how many hundreds of times did we embrace and say these most joyful of greetings to each other that night after mass?



After Sunday Mass: My brothers and cousins as altar boys



Catholic School in Brazil

builders to us and to friends who invariably hovered around our house. They would gather all and show slides and tell the history of places in the world they visited; they would invite Catholic speakers and host lectures on contemporary and historical subjects; they would host musical nights where my dad would speak of a composer and we would listen to the best world performers from the stereo, sitting under the stars. Our dinners were live classrooms: I learned more conceptual Physics at the dinner table than in any classroom, as it was a favorite subject for Father and the older boys. Mother, as well as her sister our dearest Auntie, were both superb storytellers. There is no show on television today that keeps kids as captive as were kept when a story was being told in chapters, and we would wait for the evening “chapter”.

So Christmas time was lived completely in the family, especially since school was done for the year. As we returned home from Christmas Midnight Mass on the one of the few nights in the whole year that my dad, an early-to-rise

hard working engineer, would ever stay up past midnight, a wonderful table was laid in the formal dining room—a room we were barely allowed in the rest of the year. We would crack walnuts and hazelnuts and savor the Portuguese-style boiled chestnuts, expensive and exquisite imports only seen that one holy and magical night. Cold slices of melon and ham, pineapple and other fruits, open sandwiches, juices, the rare bottle of Vintage Port, and a Walnut Torte that was divine. I was too young to be aware of how much my mother and older sisters labored over the treats, but oh the memories of being up late, savoring rare flavors, the midnight mass incense still perfuming us; the pretty Christmas trees with ornaments each telling a story; and the Christmas candlesticks and pinecones that came from distant travels. Many friends would always be around even at that late hour, and I never knew quite how they happened to appear—all smiles, Gratitude and Love abounded all around. *Feliz Natal, Feliz Natal, Feliz Natal . . .* how many hundreds of times did we

embrace and say these most joyful of greetings to each other that night after mass?

The younger kids, with myself usually leading, would venture into the hallway at dawn to peek at the gifts left by Papai Noel—or Santa Claus. We could barely see our shoes lined up by the large living room fireplace from the well constructed barricade of chairs and blankets we didn't dare trespass . . . a feast for the eyes and the certainty that there would be hours until we could get to them! All of our older siblings—including the teen siblings—would have to wake up, and we all would have to have breakfast before anyone was allowed in the formal living room.

When we finally flooded the room, all smiles and *oohs* and *aaahs*, it was the most wonderful hours of the year as we would admire each new bicycle, roller skate or tricycle, summer dress (made by Mother), and what seemed to be thousands of other wonders. Father traveled abroad often, and American or European things would be carefully wrapped—in a time when there were no imported goods for sale anywhere in Rio. Mother would also have her moment, as Father would usually have a big gift for her such as a washing machine or other large appliance. Yes, every new thing came at Christmas. No wonder we waited for it so happily.

Our Christmas season was always crowned with our annual family recital. My parents contracted a professional choir director from the Music Conservatory, who was delighted to

come weekly to direct this tropical Von Trapp crew of young music lovers. We sang all sorts of beautiful music and it is one of our best memories. My youngest sister, our darling baby Mother had late in life, was too small, and my dad didn't sing, so my mom and the nine of us were divided into Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass and tackled Renaissance polyphonies with gusto. For the annual recital, facing the open, large covered veranda, crammed full of our relatives and friends, we sang from our living room from where we could see the warm night

*Mother didn't believe
in preschool or even
Kindergarten—we were kept
at home until the second
grade, and she herself taught
us to read and write at home,
giving us all an academic
edge when we entered school.*

starry sky and the aunts who invariably wept openly and profusely year after year. Afterward we tried to dodge the older relatives who wanted to hug us to repeat their profusion of proud sentiments, and go toward the lawn, where the Southern

Cross, perched high above the tropical warmth, watched over us.

For a child, the memories of happy Christmas are engraved in the memory forever. I am fortunate to have those memories especially since so much of my childhood Christmases is different from the ones of my own children. The joyful, magical awe of Christmas has never left my heart, and each year as the holy season comes, it is there, in the heart, no matter where we live, or how many feet of snow lays outside. ♡

Ana is homeschooling mother happily celebrating Christmas with her children and husband in the northern hemisphere. She blogs at <http://anabragahenebryjournal.blogspot.com/>

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CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS BIRTHDAYS

BY CHRISTINE VOLPE

IT'S BEEN MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS SINCE THAT Christmas Eve Ben was born. The third of six children, he was oblivious to the fact that he would spend every birthday of his life wondering if anyone other than his closest family would remember to mark the day. Over the years we have made our share of mistakes in celebrating a Christmas baby's

birthday. Here are some tips for parents and family of Christmas babies which may help to avoid some common pitfalls.

Don't use Christmas wrapping paper on the birthday gifts! This is a pet peeve of many December babies. Spring for a few bucks and buy some birthday wrap. In all the busy-ness of the season, it lets the Christmas birthday person know you carved in a little time to recognize his day as a separate occasion.

Do create a unique birthday tradition that no one else in the family shares. For Benjamin, we go out to breakfast at IHOP every Christmas Eve morning. Personally, I really don't enjoy IHOP; but it's not my birthday. Since he was little Ben has looked forward to this annual pilgrimage. We indulge him to order anything off the menu. It was always funny to see the waitress's face when he was five or six years old and ordering a chocolate shake and chicken tenders at 8AM. His siblings were only allowed to order from the breakfast menu. He would get lots of attention when the servers learned it was his birthday on Christmas Eve. This year he turns eighteen, but I have a feeling

this birthday tradition will stand for years to come.

Try to choose a birthday gift that shows you put lots of thought into it. Make it something you know he would like but didn't ask for. And don't make the mistake I made three years ago when he got his first cell phone. I was so excited to have thought of this gift idea because it was something he hadn't asked for. I think I had even told him he'd have to wait another year for one. Well, when we were at the Verizon store choosing a phone, we noticed they had a two-for-one offer. So we got another phone for his younger sister Becky. It was several years later when one of Ben's older sisters shared that he was so excited to open that phone for his birthday, but the excitement quickly wore off the next morning when Becky opened the exact same thing. I have something different cooked up this year. I am crafting a picture frame using fabric from his ratty old pair of Toy Story pajamas that I could never part with, he loved them so much. The photo I'm putting in it is a favorite of a five-year-old Ben holding Buzz Lightyear and Woody.

On a similar note, and maybe I

am stating the obvious here: under no circumstances, no matter how busy you are, should you pull a gift from his Christmas gifts and use it as a birthday gift! It just depletes the number of gifts for Christmas morning and confirms to the child that you had no time for his birthday. I am happy to say, I don't recall ever doing this.

Do allow time after Christmas for some kind of celebration with friends and/or family. Benjamin understands that many people (not just his family) are otherwise engaged at this time of year. But the beautiful thing is most people have time off after Christmas and this is a perfect time for a get-together with friends, complete with birthday cake and balloons!

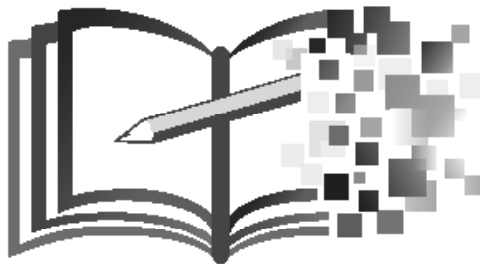
Here's something we'd done for several years when our children were younger... Dad took the kids and a few of the birthday boy's friends to McDonald's and then to whatever was the big movie that Christmas. This took care of the birthday boy's celebrating with friends in addition to giving mom (and the friends' moms)

some time to "wrap up" any last minute items. A win/win for everyone!

Finally, since Ben was small we have let him know that it is an honor to share his special day with the Lord's special day. I pray that he has come to truly believe that. I shared a birthday with my mom and I always thought it was a privilege to have that unique connection to her that no one else had. How wonderful it is to think that rather than feeling somehow resentful at having a Christmas birthday, all our Christmas babies actually grew closer to Jesus through sharing their day with Him. Time seems to have proven my theory as this year Ben begins his third year in the seminary discerning a priestly vocation.

May we all enjoy this most beautiful season of preparation and may all our Christmas babies feel the love of Christ in their hearts this year. ♡

Chris is a homeschooling mom living in NY.



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AN ANXIOUS WAITING

Father James Fryar, FSSP



THE SAME QUESTION COMES UP EACH YEAR. USUALLY IT is modified in one way or another, but in essence it is always the same.

“Is it okay to play Christmas music during Advent?”

“When should the home be embellished with Christmas decorations?”

“Are Christmas parties all right during Advent?”

All these questions point to the one main issue: should we be celebrating Christmas from Thanksgiving until December 25th, or should we abide by the calendar of the Church and celebrate Christmas from December 24th until February 2nd?

Strict theologians give an easy answer: the tree should go up on December 24th and nothing before then.

On the other hand, I would like to propose a different answer.

The reason society celebrates Christmas after Thanksgiving is primarily for commerce—which is completely wrong. We should not be celebrating Christmas in order to make a profit and sell merchandise. This is clear. However during this time of Advent, we should be longing for and awaiting the coming of Our Savior, just as the patriarchs of the Old Testament did. Many of the holy texts of the Mass point us in this direction.

To Thee have I lifted up my soul: in Thee, O my God, I put my trust, let me not be ashamed: neither let my enemies laugh at me: for none of them that wait on Thee shall be confounded (Psalm 24: 1, First Sunday of Advent).

People of Sion, behold the Lord shall come to save the nations: and the Lord shall make the glory of His voice to be heard, in the joy of your heart (Psalm 30: 30).

Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the just: let the earth be opened and bud forth a Savior (Isaiah 45: 8, Fourth Sunday of Advent).[end bq]

So I would say that it is a good thing to begin the decorations of the home at this time—but the decorations should be *incomplete* as a sign that we prepare for someone we expect but who has not arrived. The tree should be put up, but not lit. The exterior of the house could have a

few lights, yes, but the impressive lights should be installed and not yet lit. The crib should be arranged, but the Divine Child not yet placed in the manger. This way our home inspires an anxious awaiting for the coming of Our Savior. It will help us keep the Advent spirit—awaiting the coming of Our Divine Master.

Christmas parties are definitely not what we want to do during Advent. During Advent we want to mortify ourselves and fast. We want to keep vigil like the virgins with their lamps, awaiting the coming of the bridegroom (Matthew 25). Our Divine Master once posed the question to the Pharisees: “Can the children of the marriage fast, as long as the bridegroom is with them?” (Mk 2: 19). Likewise, we could say it is not right to feast before the bridegroom arrives.

During Advent we should not only begin decorating our homes, we should completely remodel our souls. We should draw closer to Our Lord by prayer and fasting. We should make a good examination of conscience and confess our sins to begin Christmas with a clean soul. We should find new spiritual books to read



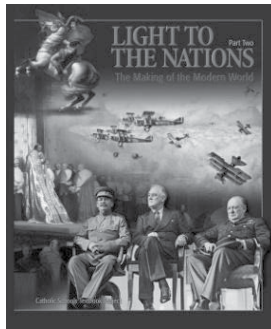
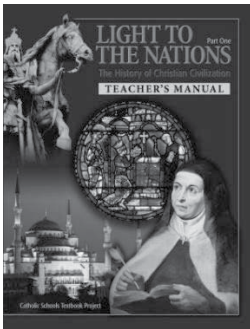
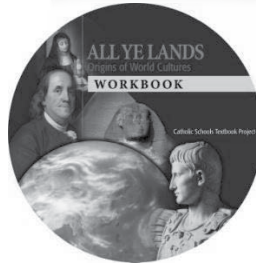
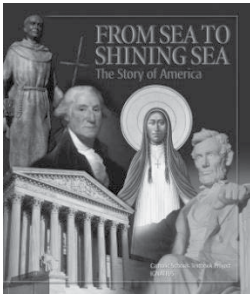
for the coming year. We should meditate on the readings of the holy texts of the liturgy. Do not wait until December 24th to prepare your heart and soul for the coming of the Divine Child. Just as you clean and ready your house, clean and ready your heart—make it ready for the joy that will fill and complete us. As St. John the Baptist bids: “Every valley shall be filled; and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight; and the rough ways plain” (Luke 3:5). ♡



*People, look east. The time is near
Of the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are
able,
Trim the hearth and set the table.
People, look east and sing today:
Love, the Guest is on the way.*
—Eleanor Farjeon, 1928

Father Fryar, FSSP, is a priest at Our Lady of Fatima Chapel in Pequannock, NJ. This article first appeared in Laudamus Te magazine. Used by permission.

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Humbled by Family History

HOW GENEALOGY CAN INSPIRE YOUR FAMILY AND
ENRICH YOUR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

BY LISA SALINAS

MY GREAT-GRANDMOTHER WAS IN HER NINETIES BY the time I got to know her. I was enamored by this little old woman with a warm smile and a strong Hungarian accent. She had placed a Miraculous Medal in my eight-year-old hand during one memorable visit. At the time I knew little of the courage and faith with which she had lived the nine long decades of her life.

As I learned many years later, young Ilona had married at age 20, said farewell to her parents and family in rural Hungary at 24, and traveled to America in the steerage section of the steamship *Carmania* with only \$10 to her name. Upon arrival at Ellis Island, she was separated from her only traveling companion: her toddler son. Sick with measles, he had to be quarantined. Her husband, who had emigrated three years earlier, waited for their release.



Me and my great-grandmother

It was March 1909 when this family of three finally settled into their new life together in a tenement building in a poor immigrant neighborhood in New York City's Lower East Side.

Partly because I wanted to know more about this dear woman and others who had come before me, partly because my immediate family and I had moved across the country away from grandparents, cousins and any roots we had, I started my genealogy journey at the age of eleven. It was an awakening for me. Like Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* childhood I had read about, my ancestors had lived lives drastically different from my own. As I began to discover my family's stories, I was humbled.

The \$10 in my great-grandmother's pocket on her trip to America: her entire fortune.
◆ *My grandfather's loss of his father at age*

eleven, and the jobs he had to take on to support his mother, grandmother, and younger brothers and sisters. ♦ The tragic accident of my train engineer great-great-grandfather, and the suffering family he left behind: his wife and fourteen children.

I was shocked. I was humbled. I was inspired. And I continue to be. As I've learned more about my family history, I've been touched by the lives of those who have gone before me, and have seen the roles my family members' played in the course of history.

My grandfather – the descendant of Irish famine immigrants and the first of his family to go to college – who graduated not only with a bachelor's degree but also a masters from Harvard Business School. ♦ My great-great-grandfather who served three months as one of the first volunteer soldiers to protect the Union after Abraham Lincoln's call to arms, and then went on to volunteer again and served for almost the entire Civil War. ♦ My great-grandmother and her sisters who, faced with the deaths

of the family's breadwinners, took jobs as seamstresses and bookkeepers to provide for themselves and their children during the difficult years of the Great Depression.

As I've shared these stories with my children, together we have begun to see how our own lives fit into the context of history. We have been humbled as we've discovered the roots from which we have sprung; the sufferings and challenges our ancestors' faced and the ways in which they dealt with those trials in their lives. In looking back into our family's past, we've been graced with a spirit of thankfulness to God for our own lives, and have been inspired by the desire to leave a legacy for those who will come after us.

.....
**DIGGING DOWN TO YOUR
 ROOTS WITH YOUR CHILDREN**

The study of your family's history can be as simple as talking with grandparents and great-grandparents about their memories, or as daunting a project as tracing your genealogy back many generations. It



Studying the ancestor chart at the family reunion

challexibility (cha-lek'-si-bil-i-tē)

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is an especially valuable project for a home educating family to take on: the study of family history enhances learning in many subject areas and can help kids develop research skills that they can adapt to many other types of projects.

Whether you just begin to scratch the surface of your roots with your children, or work to dig more deeply into the history and heritage that is yours, the rewards are great. As writer Gail Lumet Buckley wrote, “Family faces are magic mirrors. Looking at people who belong to us, we see the past, present and future. We make discoveries about ourselves.”

Intrigued by the idea of including the search for your roots into the life of your family? Here are a few suggestions to help you get started:

Take inventory at home. The search for family history best begins (*surprise!*) in the family. Take a look around your home for photographs, letters, documents, heirlooms and memorabilia that can help to get you started learning about the previous generations of your family. Names, dates and places noted on these items can give you a head start on your search (sometimes back several generations).

Talk with family. A great way to get a jump start on your history (*and great fun!*) is to interview older family members: grandparents, great-aunts and uncles, and older friends of the family. They are often the keepers of stories that may otherwise be lost to history. Have your children help you with a list of questions to ask, then plan an interview. Transcribing the recording of that interview is a good task for an older child.

Ask yourselves what you want to know about your family tree. Once you've gathered some information, take time to decide where to go with your genealogical

search. Has a particular ancestor's life intrigued one of your children (or yourself)? Take some time to determine what you already know, then decide what you'd like to learn. Make a plan to find out more and list what information you'll need to dig further into your roots.

Take your research online. Almost everyone is familiar with the paid genealogy sites that offer access to many records. Those can be very valuable, but if you are new to family history I suggest getting started with free online resources. Family Search (www.familysearch.org) is a great resource for online images of worldwide records microfilmed for the Family History Library. Heritage Quest (www.heritagequestonline.com) provides several online databases and is accessible through most library websites after you log in with your library account number. Using these resources, have your children search with you for family census records from 1940 and earlier, immigrant passenger lists, birth and death records for ancestors, and city directories in places your family might have lived.

Visit a family history center or genealogy library. Family History Centers are small genealogy libraries that offer microfilm readers for films of scanned records helpful to genealogists. The centers also provide free access to Ancestry.com and other paid subscription sites. Before you visit, order films to be sent to your local center using the online catalog at <https://familysearch.org/catalog-search>. You can search by location to see what records are available for the places that your ancestors came from. Also, many public library systems have designated genealogy libraries whose holdings include records of local interest as well as more general information that can be helpful if you are researching ancestors that did not live in your



Making a visit to the final resting place of some family members

area. These libraries can be great places to expand your research.

Take a real research trip. Make a visit to places important to your ancestors' lives: their hometowns, the places they worshipped and worked, their ports or other entry points of arrival into the United States, the cemeteries where they were laid to rest. Visits like these can make history come alive for you and your children. If you can't make a trip, see what you can learn online about the places that were important to your family. You can also check an online site (such as www.findagrave.com or www.billiongraves.com) to see if someone has posted photographs of your ancestors' gravesites.

Find a group. Historical societies, heritage centers, libraries in the areas where your ancestors lived, churches your family members attended, organizations of which they were members, lineage societies – all these can provide more details about your ancestors and the places and times in which they lived. Get into contact with these groups and organizations to see how they can help to provide insight into the lives of your ancestors.

KEEPING FAMILY MEMORY ALIVE

A Mexican proverb says that we die three deaths: the first when our bodies die, the second when they are lowered into the earth, and the third when we no longer remain in the memory of any of the living. Once you and your children discover your ancestors' names and life stories, there are many ways to celebrate their memory within the life of your family, preventing the "death of memory" and enriching your lives at the same time. Here are a few ideas:

Tell stories. What child can resist a good story? How much more meaningful



Our family enjoyed my grandmother's delicious treats for many years before we discovered that they were the traditional Hungarian dessert called Kifli

when those stories are about you and your ancestors? Each family tree has so much to tell, it is sometimes hard to know where to begin. Choose an intriguing ancestor and begin with the aspects of their life that first drew your attention, then write them down and tell them to your children in story form.

Decorate your home. Turn your home into part family history museum. Choose an empty wall or table and embellish it with vintage family photographs or a framed family tree chart. Display family heirlooms, making sure to label them and attach stories so that they will not be forgotten. If you have little ones, make a memory game of family photographs. Include your children's pictures and those of several generations of family members.

Bring the family tree into your studies. Put your ancestors into the center of your studies by adding your their lives to a historical timeline, reading books about historical events they lived through, and locating and learning about the geography of their hometowns or homelands. For more ideas to engage your children in family history, see my Pinterest page: www.pinterest.com/smallestleaf/genealogy-family-fun/.

Celebrate special days in the life of your family. Every family celebrates birthdays and anniversaries. It is lots of fun to add a remembrance of the special days in our ancestors' lives to those we already celebrate. If you like, make an ancestral family calendar with photos placed on birthdays, wedding anniversaries, and the anniversaries of their deaths.

Make the most of holidays. As you discover more about the cultural heritage of your ancestors, try to make the most of the holidays and traditions

FIVE REASONS FOR
CATHOLIC FAMILIES TO
TRACE THEIR FAMILY TREES

☛ Compassion for others different from ourselves. Chances are your ancestors' lives were very different from your own. Learning about their states in life, their occupations, cultures, languages, etc. will broaden your family's appreciation for those of different backgrounds.

☛ Appreciation for the role of the Church in history. A knowledge and understanding of the faith of our ancestors (whether or not they were Catholic) can be a great way to gain perspective on the history of the Church throughout the centuries and in different times and places.

☛ Awareness of our own mortality. Learning about ancestors who died young (and old) within the family tree can give us an understanding of life expectancy, renew our own sense of mortality, and inspire us to live lives with Heaven in mind.

☛ Respect for the dead. Learning about the lives of those who have passed before us, collecting funeral cards and programs, and visiting cemeteries can encourage us to do corporal works of mercy and also prepare us for the tasks that we may face when we one day lose our loved ones.

☛ Inspiration to live lives of faith. Every tree has some black sheep, but each family also has heroes and heroines who can provide inspiration for our own lives and our own faith journeys.

For more about tracing your Catholic family tree and for a Catholic perspective on genealogy, visit The Catholic Gene blog at www.catholicgene.wordpress.org.

within the life of your family that previous generations may have celebrated but that might have been lost in recent years. Many cultures observe special feasts related to the Catholic faith, such as the Advent customs of the Polish people (*Roraty*) and of the Philippine people (*Simbáng Gabi*). Don't forget to include favorite family recipes or traditional foods from your family's culture of origin. (For more about the Catholic faith and genealogy, see *Five Reasons for Catholic Families to Trace Their Family Trees* on page 24.)

Irish poet Seamus Heaney, who passed away this September, wrote of his strong father and grandfather, both men of the land, in a poem he entitled "Digging". He described these hard-working men of his family who came before him, concluding: "I've no spade to follow

men like these". Heaney decides, instead of trying to follow in their footsteps and take up the spade, he will take up the pen to tell their stories.

As my children and I have experienced, there are few more humbling and inspiring tasks than to dig down to the roots of your very own family tree and unearth the stories of the lives of those who came before you. We encourage you to take up your own spades and pens, dig together into the treasure of your roots, and share the personal stories that make your family tree unique.♡

Lisa Salinas shares stories of her great-grandmother's life and the rest of her family tree online using the pen name Smallest Leaf. She is the author of several blogs, two of which have been honored by Family Tree Magazine. Visit her on the web at www.smallestleaf.com.

DIGGING

by Seamus Heaney

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright
edge deep

To scatter new potatoes that we picked,
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened
up
To drink it, then fell to right away
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch
and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

From his collection Death of a Naturalist

The First Christmas Stocking

BY ELIZABETH WINTHROP

REVIEWED BY MARY C. GILDERSLEEVE

CHRISTMAS IS AN ABSOLUTELY MAGICAL TIME OF YEAR. One thing that makes it especially so in our house is finding great books to give and read during the holidays. There is one that particularly stands out among the myriad of books we've bought: *The First Christmas Stocking* by Elizabeth Winthrop. It is a tale of a poor family in the

not-so-distant past, a family who struggles to make ends meet, a family where the dad is a miner and the mom knits fancy socks for the fancy ladies in town. Claire, the daughter, learns to knit stockings, too to help her mother. Just before Christmas, a large commission comes in, one that will solve the financial worries of the family for a while. But, as fate would have it, the mother dies. Claire is not sure if she can knit to the standard her mother did but she must for both she and her father's survival.

The story evolves into one of faith, hope, and charity—a classic Christmas story!

I love to give this book to newborns, especially those born around Christmastime. With the book, I include the baby's first Christmas stocking in which I knit dreams and love for the newborn. I'd like to share a pattern with you, as a gift to all you readers, of one of the stockings I've made in the past.

VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS STOCKING

Materials:

- approx 300 yards of worsted weight wool or wool blend (sample used Lion Brand's "Lion Wool")
- #5 US dpns (or 16" circls)
- Stitch markers (or scrap bits of yarn to mark beginning of rnds)

Gauge:

Not critical for this project, but I achieved a 5st/7r per inch gauge.

Finished Size

Approx. 17" long (toe to BO) x 5" wide

Note: this stocking is knit in the round from the toe to the cuff, using two different lace patterns found on a knitted lace sampler from the late 19th century.

Making Up:

CO 6.

K 1 rnd.

(k1, m1) rep around – 12 sts. K 1 rnd

(k1, m1, k1) rep around – 18 sts. K 1 rnd

(k1, m1, k2) rep around – 24 sts. K 1 rnd

(k1, m1, k3) rep around – 30 sts. K 1 rnd

(k1, m1, k4) rep around – 36 sts. K 1 rnd

(k1, m1, k5) rep around – 42 sts. K 1 rnd

(k1, m1, k6) rep around – 48 sts. K 1 rnd

(k1, m1, k7) rep around – 54 sts. K 1 rnd

(k1, m1, k8) rep around – 60 sts. K 5 rnds.

Lace Patt 1 (done in the rnd):

Rnd 1: purl rnd

Rnd 2: purl rnd

Rnd 3: (yo, ssk) rep

Rnd 4: knit rnd

Rnd 5: purl rnd

Rnd 6: purl rnd

K rnd till 28 rnds (approx. 4 inches above lace pattern).

Heel

(garter st short rows)

K 29 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 29 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 28 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 27 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 26 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 25 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 24 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 23 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 22 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 21 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 20 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 19 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 18 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 17 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 16 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 15 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 14 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.



Sl 1 st, k 13 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 12 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 11 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 10 sts, yf, slip next st, yb, slip st back, turn.

(garter st REVERSE short rows)

Sl 1 st, k 10 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 11 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 12 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 13 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 14 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 15 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 16 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 17 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 18 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 19 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 20 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 21 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 22 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 23 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 24 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 25 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 26 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 27 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 28 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

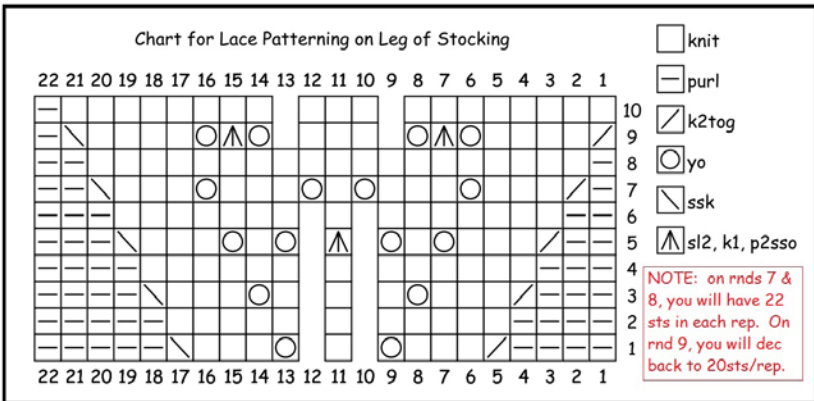


Chart for Lace at toe and cuff

	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	□ knit
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3	↘	○	↘	○	↘	○	↘	○	↘	○	○ yo
2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	□ ssk
	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	

Sl 1 st, k 29 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

Sl 1 st, k 30 sts, with lh needle, lift wrap from next st, k2tog, turn.

K2rnds on all 60 sts.

Begin Lace Pattern 2 (knit in the rnd – multiple of 20 sts):

Rnd 1: (p4, k2tog, k3, yo, k1, yo, k3, ssk, k5) rep arnd

Rnd 2: (p4, k11, p5) rep arnd

Rnd 3: (p3, k2tog, k3, yo, k3, yo, k3, ssk, k4) rep arnd

Rnd 4: (p3, k13, p4) rep arnd

Rnd 5: (p2, k2tog, k3, yo, k1, yo, k3tog, yo, k1, yo, k3, ssk, p3) rep arnd

Rnd 6: (p2, k15, p3) rep arnd

Rnd 7: (p1, k2tog, k3, yo, k3, yo, k1, yo, k3, yo, k3, ssk, p2) rep arnd [note: 22 st rep]

Rnd 8: (p1, k19, p2) rep arnd [note: 22 st rep]

Rnd 9: (k2tog, k4, yo, k3tog, yo, k3, yo,

k3tog, yo, k4, ssk, p1) rep arnd

Rnd 10: (k19, p1) rep arnd

Rep these 10 rows for a total of 5 repeats.

K2rnds

Rep Lace Pattern 1.

BO 15sts. Chain 10. BO 45 sts.

Tuck in all ends and give with a copy of the book, *The First Christmas Stocking!* ♡

Mary C. Gildersleeve's main vocation is living, loving and learning in the heart of her home with her younger three children (ages 8-12) while her older two are positioned to leave the nest completely. Thanks to her husband, Rick, she's able to spend time doing handcrafts with the kids and operating By Hand, With Heart, a hand-knits design company. She is the author of In His Image: Nurturing Creativity in the Heart of Your Home and Great Yarns for the Close-Knit Family: Over two dozen original designs inspired by one dozen fantastic family read-alouds – both titles published by Hillside Education. She and her family are loving, living and learning in a rural county in central Virginia, about an hour south of Washington, D.C.

The Christmas Tree

BY GWEN WISE

THE CHRISTMAS TREE IS ONE OF, IF NOT THE MOST recognizable symbols of Christmas. It is everywhere, indoors and out, and you'll probably enjoy as much as I have a new little meditation on their beauty and purpose.

The other day, I picked up a library copy of: *The Blessings of Christmas* by the prolific author Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), published by Ignatius Press. The first part deals with the challenges of illness, but includes a very special section on the Christmas tree from which we all might gain a new insight or two.

Pope Benedict reminds us that almost all of our Advent customs are rooted in Scripture: "Here, the faithful people have, as it were, translated Scripture into visible signs." I just love that thought! Of all the customs of Advent and Christmas I would have thought the tree would have the least connection to Scriptural roots, but thankfully I was wrong.

"For example, we read in Psalm 96: 'Then shall all the trees of the wood sing for joy before the Lord, for He comes.'" Expanding on this and other verses, the liturgy proclaims: "The mountains and hills will sing praise before God, and all the trees of the wood will clap their hands, for the Lord, the ruler is coming to rule for ever."

Then as I read the next paragraph, those goosebumps pour over me as they so often do when I perceive a new level of the sacramental nature of the world:

The Christmas trees we decorate are simply an attempt to make these words visible. The Lord is here—our ancestors believed this and knew this, and so the trees had to go out to meet him, they had to bow down before him, the trees themselves had to become a song of praise to their Lord. The same certainty of faith led them to make the words about the singing mountains and hills a reality. They gave a voice to the mountains, and their singing resounds down through the centuries into our own days, letting us sense something of the nearness of the Lord—for it is only he who could give men such melodies" (pg 29).

Dr. Taylor Marshall (taylormarshall.com) calls Advent "the parenthesis in which falls all of Christian history," and all humanity is longing to participate more fully in its signs and wonders—the season has a special power to "touch the hearts even of unbelievers."

This year as you decorate your tree, contemplate the nearness of the Lord, who through the gift of time has given us the simple tree and this liturgical season called Advent. The Lord

who came in the “fullness of time” now comes in a myriad of sacramental ways to call all people (even those who don’t yet know the meaning of this season) “to bow down before Him.”



Here is a Christmas Tree blessing ceremony for the home which you can use, even if you have already decorated your tree. It is traditionally said on Christmas Eve before the lighting of the tree.

All make the sign of the cross as the leader says:

Blessed be the name of the Lord.

All reply: *Now and for ever.*

One of those present reads a text of sacred Scripture, for example:

Brothers and sisters, listen to the words of the apostle Paul to Titus (3:4-7):

But when the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

Or:

Genesis 2:4-9—The tree of life in the center of the garden. Isaiah 9:1-6—A son is given to us. Ezekiel 17:22-24—I will plant a tender shoot on the mountain heights of Israel.

(A minister who is a priest or deacon says the prayer of blessing with hands outstretched; a lay minister says the prayer with hands joined.)

Lord our God, we praise you for the light of creation: the sun, the moon, and the stars of the night. We praise you for the light

of Israel: the Law, the prophets, and the wisdom of the Scriptures. We praise you for Jesus Christ, your Son: he is Emmanuel, God-with-us, the Prince of Peace, who fills us with the wonder of your love.

Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we illumine this tree. May the light and cheer it gives be a sign of the joy that fills our hearts. May all who delight in this tree come to the knowledge and joy of salvation. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **All:** *Amen.*

Or:

Holy Lord, we come with joy to celebrate the birth of your Son, who rescued us from the darkness of sin by making the cross a tree of life and light.

May this tree, arrayed in splendor, remind us of the life-giving cross of Christ, that we may always rejoice in the new life that shines in our hearts. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **All:** *Amen.* ♡

Prayer Source: Book of Blessings by Prepared by International Commission on English in the Liturgy A Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1989

This article was adapted from an original post on the blog O Night Divine (http://maryellenb.ty.pepad.com/o_night_divine/). Used by permission.

Gwen Wise just began her 20th year of homeschooling. She lives in Colorado with the youngest 3 of her 7 children and her husband Michael who made his First Communion and was confirmed 3 years ago. She has written for O Night Divine for several years and recently began blogging about her Catholic women's book club at www.atleastwewerehere.wordpress.org.

Offer God Your Very Self

Caryll Houselander

BETHLEHEM IS THE INSCAPE OF CALVARY, JUST AS THE snowflake in the inscape of the universe. As we have seen, the pattern of the universe in a snowflake is not only an accidental likeness, but

something essential to its being, entirely in every part of it, interpenetrating it.

This pattern is not completely visible to the naked eye, but some aspects of it are. For example, in the dazzling movement of the snowflakes, as they spin round and round to earth, we see the perpetual rotations of the stars; for movement is as essentially in the pattern of the universe as symmetry.

But there is a design of extraordinary loveliness which cannot even be seen through an ordinary microscope, a repetition of the design of the whole snowflake in every minute particle of it, hiding the unity of the whole universe in less than a pinpoint of it.

In the same way, the Passion of the man Christ on Calvary is at once revealed and hidden in the infant Christ in



Bethlehem. Some of this mystery is visible to our eyes, but much of it can only be known inwardly when, after we have knelt in wonder for a long time before that which we can see, Christ chooses to reveal it secretly to us, illuminating the darkness of the spirit with His light, as the star of Bethlehem shone in the dark night of His birth.

There, at the stable at Bethlehem, began the lovely waste that is the extravagance of love, that is and will always be scandal to the loveless.

Already, as in the useless crown of gold that the infant's head could not support shone at His feet, as clouds of incense hung in the rafters of the stable, and as the air grew fragrant with the smell of myrrh, the box of precious ointment was broken to anoint the Beloved for His burial. Already before God the great cathedrals arose, growing up to Him like forest of stone. Jewels from the crowns of kings and queens were set in chalices of beaten gold. Already contemplatives, drawn by inner compulsion as mysterious as the migration of birds, flocked to God. Carmelites, Malthusians, Trappists, Poor Clares, were received into the Infant's open hands, and there nailed into the Man's hands nailed to the Cross—nailed by the three vows that are the three nails that hold Christ in us to the cross of suffering and the love that redeems the world. "To what purpose is this waste? For this might have been sold for much and given to the poor."

At Bethlehem He was wrapped in swaddling bands and laid in a manger; on Calvary He was wrapped in swaddling bands and laid in a tomb.

Both the manger and the tomb were borrowed. Both had been made for their owners. They were not made for Christ. All that had been prepared for Him, God

had set aside, God chose what men should give to this son and He chose things so shaped or worn to the givers' touch that they could not be given without the giving of self.

Christ accepted those offerings in which self was given; not what man had made for Him, but what man had made for himself—the gifts with self at the core, involving the surrender of the giver's will, even in the choice of the gift.

So it is today and always. We would like to give God gifts of our own choosing which, even if they are in one sense part of our life, are yet things added on for the purpose of giving, without having to pull up anything of ourselves at the roots.

We are often surprised when, after we have offered God several litanies a day and a pest of little mortifications, He chooses instead something that is really ourselves: our solitude, for example, or the sweetness of the feelings of love, or, as is very frequent now, our home. It is what God chooses that kindles in the crucible and burns the flame of love.

In the inscape of Calvary, in the Passion of the infant Jesus, we behold His Resurrection from the dead. Christ came out of the darkness of the womb. He was the Light of the World. He came to give the world life. The life of the whole world burnt in the tiny flame of an infant's life; it began the age-long fight with death in the least and frailest that human nature can be; and in the helplessness, the littleness, the blindness of an infant, life prevailed. The Light of the World shone in darkness.

At Bethlehem love and death met in the body of Christ, and love prevailed. ♡

(Reprinted from The Passion of the Infant Christ, Sheed and Ward 1949)

Some Books for Christmas Giving

Picture Books by Maite Roche

Reviewed by Ana Braga-Henebry

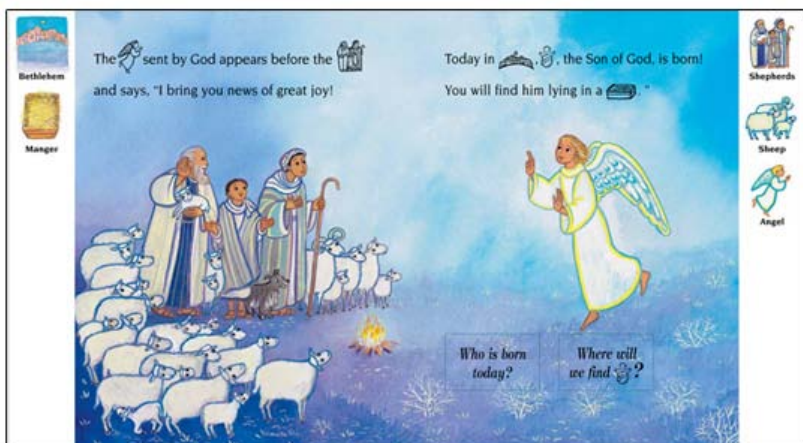
I am an eternal lover of children's books, no matter how old my own children are. Thankfully with my youngest girls at 12 and 14 years old, we still enjoy sitting and coloring together! And that's a good thing since Ignatius is publishing a new coloring book by French illustrator Maite Roche just in time for Christmas! Amazon lists the publication date as November 1st, and I already pre-ordered multiple copies!

Maite Roche is a Catholic illustrator who does adorable work for children's books. She has numerous titles published in different formats, and in many languages. In the USA both Pauline Books and Ignatius Press have published them in English. They make wonderful gifts for Baptism or birthdays.

Her artwork has many qualities I look for in children's books: her figures are proportional, beautifully positioned, and they behave naturally and comfortably through the pages. Her lines are simple, and her colors very pleasant. They are also very cute and appeal to young children easily. Some of other titles include the bible and gospel stories, the liturgical year, the Blessed Mother and the Mass. Maite Roche's books reflect her own faithfulness and love for the Catholic faith. May God continue blessing her productivity!

Christmas-related books by Maite Roche:

The First Noel, A Pop-Up Advent Calendar with Booklet (Paperback), *The Christmas Shepherds* (Hardcover), *My First Pictures of Christmas* (Hardcover), *My First Prayers For Christmas* (Hardcover), Coming out just in time for Christmas: *Christmas Coloring Book*



Road of Hope: a gospel from prison

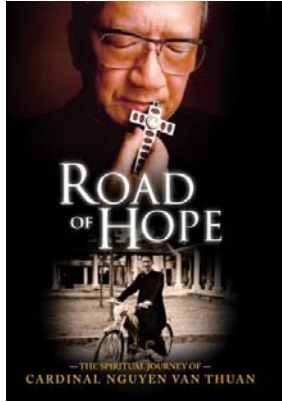
BY FRANCIS XAVIER NGUYEN VAN THUAN

Reviewed by Angela Rioux

Road of Hope is the collection of 1001 messages Bishop Thuan wrote to his Vietnamese flock during his thirteen-year imprisonment. He scribbled them on small pieces of paper, which were smuggled out of his cell, copied by hand, and secretly distributed to the community. His indomitable love for God and his people is evident in every word. Deprived of freedom, he nevertheless risked his life to give practical guidance and

maintain a no-nonsense, encouraging presence in his parishes through the written word. These messages, though brief, pack a punch. They ask the sort of questions that unmask complacency. They encourage us to turn our inmost

hearts to God and devote ourselves to all that that entails in this life. They challenge us to see nothing but God's love in even the hardest situations. They remind us that hope is more than a feeling. It is adherence to a promise, and to keep hope strong and healthy, they remind us that we must feed our minds and hearts on that great Promise.



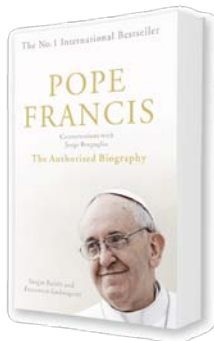
Pope Francis: Conversations with Jorge Bergoglio

BY SERGIO RUBIN AND FRANCESCA AMBROGETTI

Reviewed by Angela Rioux

This book is composed of a series of interviews with Cardinal Bergoglio from 2010 and seeks, successfully, to give us a picture of the man who is now our Pope. From his family history to discerning his call to the priesthood to the unique challenges facing him as a cardinal in Argentina; from his preferences in art, music,

and poetry to his spiritual life; from his regrets to his frank and hope-filled devotion to the present, Bergoglio is humorous, humble, and filled with an appreciation for the mystery of life. He is both passive and active in his openness to the world. He loves God, and he loves God's Church. He loves Argentina and his culture. He loves all peoples. He reminds us to have patience, first with ourselves, always with others. Though the world



is dark in so many ways, we should never succumb to discouragement. “All joking aside, one should not confuse optimism with hope,” he tells us at the very end of the interviews. “Optimism is a psychological attitude towards life. Hope goes

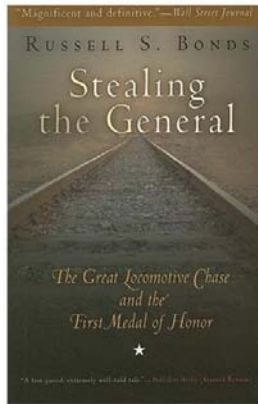
further than that. It’s the anchor you toss into the future and can pull on to reach what you wish to attain. It’s making an effort in the right direction. Besides, hope is theological: God is involved. That is why I believe life will triumph.”

Stealing the General: The Great Locomotive Chase and the First Medal of Honor

BY RUSSELL S. BONDS

Reviewed by Maria Rioux

This is both a well-written and well-documented account of the attempt by Andrew’s Raiders to steal the Confederate train, the General. Had this small group of men been able to accomplish their goal, the Civil War would in all likelihood have ended years sooner. They came so very close, too. Of course, my sympathies lie with the



Union, but I could not help but admire the bravery and perseverance of some of those who fought for the Confederacy. The book is completely gripping, simply riveting, though also quite grim and sad in parts. It is a witness to some of the qualities in men we women so love and rely upon: courage, self-sacrifice and dogged determination. That said, fallen nature is something we all share, so no one in this story gets away with being perfect.

Recommended for grade 11 through adult.

Destiny of the Republic: A Tale of Madness, Medicine, and the Murder of a President

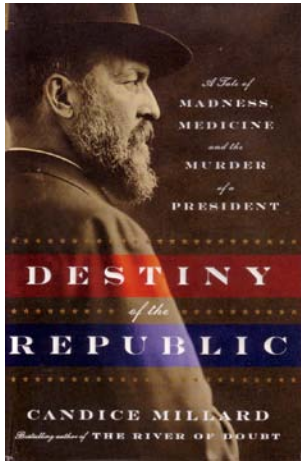
BY CANDICE MILLARD

Reviewed by Maria Rioux

This is the story of the assassination of President Garfield. I

have to admit that, for quite a few years, I never gave Garfield much thought. He was president for about three months. A blip on the radar, in my cold-hearted historical mind. I was

so very wrong and thank Candice Millard for teaching me. Garfield was a great man, a beautiful soul, and his assassination was a tragic loss for his family and our country. I will add that he taught me something I was pretty sure I would never learn: it is possible to recover from marital infidelity. Garfield was unfaithful at one point and for a very short time.



He could not stand himself and told his wife who said it had to end yesterday. It did. Oddly, it actually seemed to bring them closer. Firstly, they both recognized what they had and wanted to keep. Secondly, they recognized how they had been failing each other and they put their efforts into correcting that. They ended up growing so much closer as a

sort of consequence. I am not, of course, advocating infidelity to enhance one's marriage, and this is but a very small part of the story. It is indicative, however, of the character of Garfield, who despite this weakness, was a giant among men, a wonderful father, and a powerful force for good.

You will be amazed by the efforts of Alexander Graham Bell to

save the president and locate the bullet still lodged within him. Lister also urged cleanliness and sterilization, but he was still, sadly, being completely ignored by the medical community in America. It's a fascinating read from a personal, historical and scientific perspective.

Recommended for ages grade 11-adult

Navigating Early

BY CLAIRE VANDERPOOL

Reviewed by Cecilia Davidson

Navigating Early is an inventive odyssey of a novel, by the Newberry Medal winning author, Clare Vanderpool (2011, *Moon Over Manifest*). Early (whom Vanderpool reveals in the Afterward to be what we would call *savant autistic*), lives at an East Coast boarding school. The other students tolerate him, and he is left on his own most of the time. New student Jack befriends him and ends up

wrapped up in Early's strange but compelling world. Early sees the number *Pi* as a never-ending story, which, as it plays out, most people will recognize as the familiar "hero's journey," complete with all of its essential elements (the hero, the mentor, the ordeal, the tricksters, the villain, etc.). Early believes that this is the story of his older brother, who, just like *Pi*, sailed away and never came back. But he also seems to believe that it is *his* story as well, and Jackie's. Jackie is skeptical, but as the story goes on, more

and more elements of *Pi's* journey coincide with real life, and he is forced to admit that there must be something to Early's theory. What Jackie fails to understand (but Early, with all his oddities, does), is that *Pi's* story—the hero's journey—is *everyone's* story. Vanderpool has taken the epic journey saga, and made it real. This is really what gives her characters such a lovely duality— they exist as archetypes in Early's story, but as real people in the world. And *Pi's* inward journey, as he learns to overcome his pride and fear and face the terrible things which happen to him on his journey, is as much about Jackie's

own struggles to overcome the death of his mother and his rocky relationship with his father as it is about Early coping with losing his brother. It is a universal story with surprising plot twists and a unique voice, set in the confusion of the

post-World War II world, where everyone they meet is essentially searching for the same thing that *Pi* is—a way to go home.

With rich detail, fresh ideas, and true gift for storytelling, Vanderpool has created a gripping, satisfying story.

This review is an adapted from a review first published in Tale Magazine. Used by permission. ♡



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Advent Calendar

A VILLANELLE

Our scene: the rugged manger, cold and bare.
Each numbered box keeps treasure there below.
We must have faith in what is hidden there.

From one to twenty-five, the numbers stare.
They beg us, "Open!" Peek beneath white snow,
behind the rugged manger, cold and bare.

Each ox and donkey, sheep and bird declare
the unseen wealth beneath this picture show.
We must have faith in what is hidden there.

We test our patience with this slow affair.
December days will linger even though
we watch the manger closely. Cold and bare

our wait seems until we become aware
that the *last door* is here! We're all aglow!
We're now rewarded with what's hidden there.

Our calendar complete, we're now prepared,
to gaze into this Christmas long ago,
this Child, His rugged manger, cold and bare.
We must have faith in what is hidden there. ♡

— Lisa Salinas





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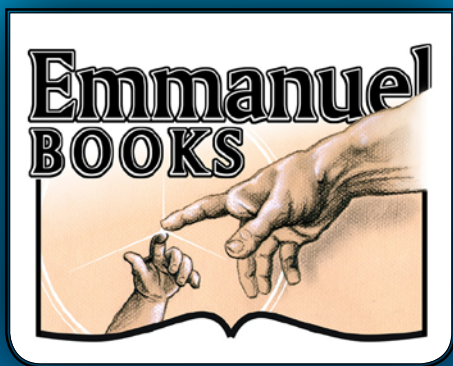
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