

The Story of CHRISTMAS



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Part 1: PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS

THE SEASON OF ADVENT

SINCE Christmas is such an important day in our lives, there are many things we have to do to prepare for it.

Months before Christmas arrives we begin to think about the presents that we will receive from our parents. We must ask to go to the toy store or talk to our friends to decide what we should ask them to buy for us.

As the day approaches, there are all kinds of preparations to do at home. We help Dad and Mom get ready for our celebration.

We help them clean the house, bake cookies, decorate the Christmas tree, and all the other things that have to be done. There is really a lot to do to get ready for Christmas.

Yet, we have to be careful that we do not spend all our time preparing our homes and then forget to prepare our hearts. That is why we have a special time of the year called Advent.

The Season of Advent is when we look at our hearts to make sure that we are ready to welcome the Baby Jesus into our lives and our love.



JESUS IS LOST IN THE TEMPLE

JOSEPH and Mary were very good Jews, and each year they would travel up to Jerusalem for the great feast of Passover. When Jesus was twelve years old, the age at which a Jewish boy became a man, they took Him up with them.

After the feast, Joseph and Mary set out to return to Nazareth. They looked around for Jesus, but they could not find Him. At first they thought He was in another part of the camp. But when they came to rest that evening and still did not find Him, they realized He was lost.

Joseph and Mary returned to Jerusalem and looked for Jesus for three days. They went up to the Temple and searched for Him there.

His parents were most surprised when they found Jesus sitting in the Temple and speaking with the elders. He was listening to their teaching and asking them questions.

Mary went up to Jesus and asked Him, “Son, why have You done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for You.”

Jesus answered her, “Why were you looking for Me? Did you not know that I must be in My Father’s house?” He then returned with Mary and Joseph and stayed in Nazareth until the day that He began His preaching.



THE “OPLATEK”

WE have spoken of a number of Christmas customs, but there is one other thing that reminds us of Christmas: food. Christmas is a time when we come together as a family and share a large supper with many wonderful types of food.

Each nation has its own traditions that involve food. In England, for example, people eat goose and plum pudding. In Italy, there is a special coffee cake named the “Panettone” and a candy filled with nuts called “Torrone.” In America, we have our Christmas cookies and fruitcake. Many families also have either ham or turkey for dinner on Christmas Day.

One beautiful custom involving food is found in Poland. There people bake pieces of bread that look almost like the hosts we use at Mass. They are called “oplatek,” and each piece has a holy picture pressed upon its surface.

In the old days, people would carry their “oplatek” from house to house and wish their neighbors a Merry Christmas. Today, the bread is mostly shared with members of the family and immediate neighbors.

As each person shares the bread, he or she is asked to do two things: forgive any hurts that have occurred over the past year and wish the person all the possible happiness in the coming year.