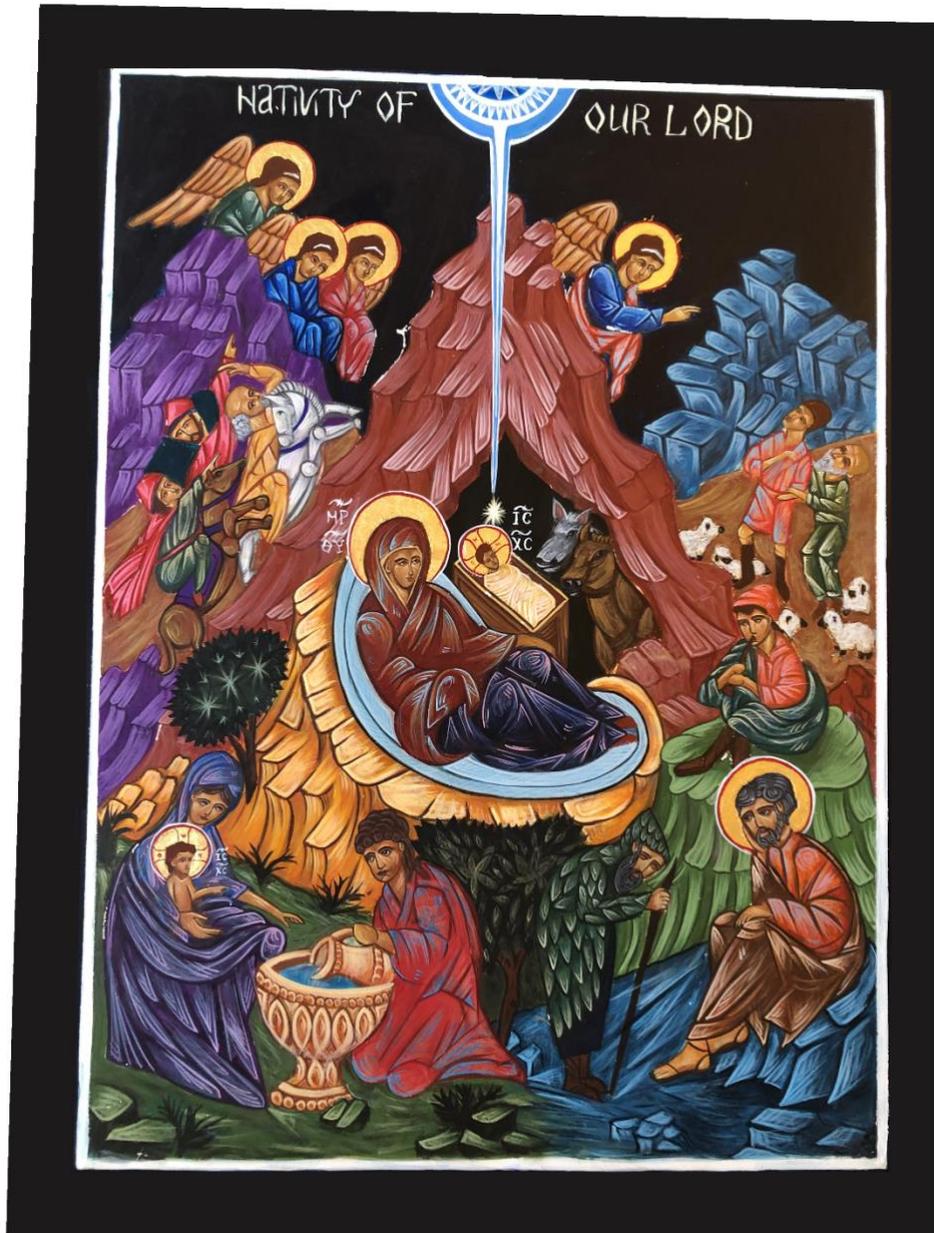


Nativity Celebration Dinner



Feast Day
Anytime December 21 - 24

Overview

The purpose of the Nativity Dinner is to provide an intentional time for family to gather at the table to celebrate the first coming of Christ. Today's family Christmas tends to be more focused on Santa Clause and opening presents. Unfortunately, Christ tends to take second place of importance. As a way to honor Christ before all things, the Nativity Dinner is a great way to open the Christmas festivities. It does not discount the fun secular traditions found at Christmas, but rather puts them in their proper place. Our family plans our Nativity dinner close to the winter solstice, generally on December 21, 22 or 23. This provides a sacred time together; furthermore, it will not conflict if you have general Christmas Eve or Day plans with any of your extended family.

Our family cooks our dinner before we begin our ceremonial time. We generally do a beef tenderloin with roasted vegetables. Costco has some amazing cuts for a family. Any typical Christmas dinner is fine. Given it is the darkest time of the year, we prefer refreshments like Russian imperial stouts or a bold red wine. After the food is cooked, we keep it warm to eat after the ceremony. For adults, we enjoy the drinks during the ceremony, and sometimes toddlers may need a snack depending on how they are doing.

As for the ceremony, we have found it works best to not be too liturgical *or too free form*. Everyone should be seated at the table. You need a structure, but ability to be flexible and let it flow. Kids attention spans tend to be short, so it is best to keep each section moving and to read them. Below you'll find how we structure the ceremony. The leader will read everything in non bold text, everyone can read the bolded text.

Introduction

May the Lord be with you

And also with you.

O God, you make us glad by the yearly festival of the birth of your only Son Jesus Christ: Grant that we, who joyfully receive him as our Redeemer, may with sure confidence behold him when he comes to be our Judge; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. ***Amen***

Show the kids the bible. Explain to them today we are celebrating the birth of Christ, and that the bible is very important as it tells his story. Tell them that you are going to open it up to read after they turn off all the lights in the house and come back to take a seat at the dinner table.

Turn off all the lights in the house

Everyone sits at the table in the darkness for a minute or so. It's a pretty unique experience.

Reading

Open [Book lamp](#)

Read: John 1:1-18

After reading scripture, tell them about how the bible illuminates our life. It's the source of light and love. Feel free to add analogy or idea you think of. I pass around the book lamp for each kid to help get a first hand experience holding it.

Light The Advent Wreath

I put on Josh Garrel's "A Light Came Down" song in the background as we begin lighting candles. It provides a nice worshipful background. You can choose any Christmas song that is dear to you.

Tell everyone that we are now going to now light the advent wreath. I use a typical lighter to light my [beeswax candle](#). With my candle lit, I tell them that Christ is the light of the world and came today more than 2000 years ago to give us his light. I then light others candle and share the light of Christ with them. Kids take turns lighting each of the 5 advent candles. We tell them about each one: hope, love, joy, peace, Christ. I also have other candles in the room we can light.

Talk about the Nativity

I am an Iconographer, so I paint Icons for every major feast day to talk about. I painted an Icon of the Nativity of our Lord that is found on this cover. I share the story of this icon to the people at the table. The icon is found throughout Eastern Christianity and is unique because it is based on the Protoevangelium of John written around 145. I think the story is interesting because it provides an apocryphal story of The Nativity. The story is pretty much the same; however, there are more characters involved and details (i.e. Joseph's experience and doubt). The interpretation of this icon is found here: <https://www.orthodoxroad.com/nativity-icon-explained/>

For those who tend to be less open to apocryphal writings or ancient Christian oral traditions, I would just focus on the nativity scene you have at home. Talk about the story found in the canonical scriptures. You can share the roles of all the figures. I personally like to slowly assemble the nativity during every Sunday of advent with the kids. The climax is adding Jesus to the manger scene during Nativity dinner. You can wrap up the baby Jesus part of the nativity and have the kids unwrap it. You can explain that Jesus is the gift of Christmas. This really excites the kids to unwrap the first gift and puts Christ in his proper place.

I also have the wise men positioned across the room as they are still on their way. They will arrive at the nativity scene on Epiphany (Kings Feast Day on January 7th).

Sing Some Christmas Carols

We then sing some Christmas Carols. Bring a guitar if you can play. Otherwise, just sing a cepella. We generally do three carols (one verse each) as our toddlers attention spans diminish. I think Joy to the World, Oh Holy Night, and Silent Night are pretty good ones. Any work.

Christmas Devotion and the Gift of Words

This is a reflection I wrote that you can read:

Today, during this festive season of Christmas, we stop to take a break, and appreciate Christ coming. Not just 2000 years ago, but today into this busy world and society in which we live. Your first coming causes us to stop and reflect on the deeper purpose of life. As our culture continues to be overly consumed with material gifts, we take time today to press pause, get out of the stores, and provide different gifts to our loved ones. To combat the impulses of our society, the advent season has always focused on almsgiving (the practice of giving money or food to the poor). Giving alms is a way to free ourselves from our own selfishness. So today, in the comfort of family, we provide words of appreciation and encouragement to each other. We can also write a letter of appreciation to a person in our history who has made a difference in our lives (optional).

Due to low attention spans with toddlers, we generally just have one adult pick one kid and share what they appreciate about the child. Specifically how God made and why they are unique.

Lord we pray for all the gifts to come in the cadence of this joyful Christmas season, both material and non-material, given and received, genuine and commercial, practical & comical. May we have a pure heart in front of you as we give and receive this season. May the words we receive today be a tangible reminder to us of how you love and see us. May the words we give to others be a reminder of how you desire for us to “speak life” into those created in your image. Lastly, we thank you for the gift of your Son, full of beauty, who is one of us, yet profoundly more than we will ever comprehend.

Closing Prayer

O God, you have caused this holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light: Grant that we, who have known the mystery of that Light on earth, may also enjoy him perfectly in heaven; where with you and the Holy Spirit he lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*