



“They are trees planted by streams of water; they bear fruit; their leaves do not wither; in all that they do they prosper.” Ps 1:3

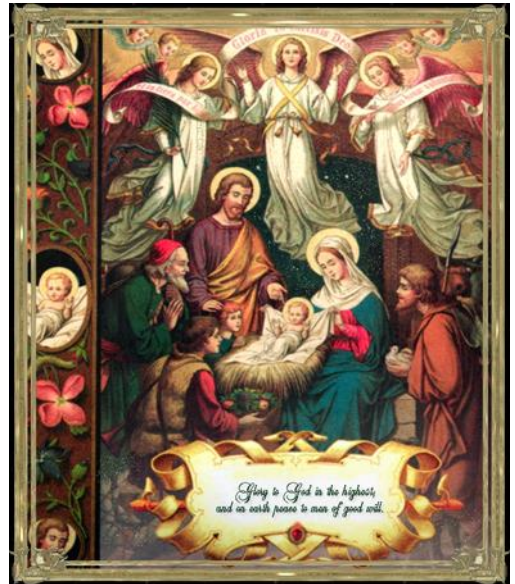
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The Theme for 2017: “Watch and Pray” Mathew:26:41

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Christmas : A Season of Good Cheer

This year right from the 1st of December, people have been anticipating Christmas as a season of joy and festivity. We see messages being forwarded, pictures being sent and recipes being shared through social media. Houses and shops are lit up and decorated; it’s a wonderful feeling of holiday spirit and joy with Christmas parties and carol singing all through the month.

Mother the Church enters into the season of Advent before we celebrate the birth of Jesus echoing the cry of John the Baptist to repent and prepare our hearts for the coming of the Savior.

Every Advent Season gives us one more opportunity to come back to the Lord if we have wandered away and for the lost to be found. It is a time for us to slow down our activities and reflect of the true essence of the coming of the Lord to be born again in our lives.

John 1:11 says, He came to His own but His own received Him not, we have a compassionate, merciful and loving saviour who desires to come to us and to be a part of our life in a fuller way. As we prepare our hearts for the Lord, let us ask ourselves am I ready to welcome Him in whole heartedly? are there any room in my life that I have not yet opened for Jesus, the room of my entertainment, old habits or a particular relationship etc. Is there something or a burden that I need to release in His hands, is there a brother or sister or neighbour I need to forgive.

Let's take time out from all our external preparations and do a little bit of soul searching. Let us visit the confessional with a genuinely repentant heart, let us open our hands and heart to the poor the needy and let us take that box of sweets as a peace offering to a brother or sister or neighbour with whom I need to make amends that will truly usher in the Christmas spirit of good cheer. "Merry Christmas".

- *Core Team*

Lord's Love and Faithfulness - A testimony

Jeremiah 29:11 "I alone know the plans I have for you - plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for."

I come from a Catholic Keralite family, born and raised in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. My house was located near the airport and I was used to watching aircraft right from my childhood, which always fascinated me, and I had this dream to become a commercial airline pilot. However, the dream did not materialize due to financial reasons. All the decisions at home and in

my personal life were always centred on making ends meet. I then, took up engineering and after a couple of years I got my MBA degree and got a decent job in Muscat.

I was a very active member of my church youth group and an Altar server all my school days. However, I never experienced God in all those years. It was during one of the retreats in Ruwi Church in the year 2012 that, I experienced the love and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. God blessed me with the fellowship of Jesus Youth and after some time, MIPC. Life has never been the same since.

In the fellowship, I learned the importance of Tithe. The Lord says in the book of *Malachi - you bring your tithe to the temple and put me to the test and you will see that I will open the windows of heaven and pour out on you in abundance all kinds of good things. I started giving tithe and miracles started to happen in my life.*

My dad had bought a vacant plot in early 1980s, however it got into some legal trouble and he never got the ownership even after years of follow up. Then out of nowhere, in Dec 2012, after a gap of more than 30 years that legal problem got solved on its own and we got the ownership of the house. My mom was suffering from colon cancer and she had undergone multiple operations and chemotherapy and radiations. In 2014, she was again diagnosed with cancer and it so happened that we could not get the necessary approval from the insurance company prior to her operation date. God intervened, and the hospital staff agreed to go ahead with the operation even without getting any confirmation from the insurance agency. They did not even ask for any guarantee or security deposit from us. Praise God!!!

We always wanted to build our own house in Kerala, but we were never able to start the project due to lack of funds. In 2015, I decided to take a big loan and start construction of the house. God, true to his promise, made the provisions and the house was constructed without me taking any loan. Whenever I went for any work, at any govt office or to any other office, God always ensured that everything worked out very smoothly for me. The biggest blessing that I got over a period, was the release from the enslaving thought in the back of my mind, that I lack money. All my decisions till

that point were always influenced by the lack of money. But after I experienced that freedom, I realized ***that it is God who provides for all our needs, we don't have to worry*** about how and from where it will come. As the Lord says in the scriptures, ***Mathew 7:11 "As bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more then will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him."***

The scripture says in ***Acts 16:31 "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your family."*** My family changed completely and all of us grew in faith and started praying earnestly.

In Nov 2016, I suffered a small fracture in the left knee joint and was advised by the doctors, both in Muscat and in Kerala, not to run, not to lift any weight and not to put any strain on my left leg henceforth, or else the injury will get worse. These restrictions made me feel very low and It affected my confidence.

The dream to become a pilot always remained alive in my heart during all these years. Back in India my mom's condition worsened due to relapse of cancer. I decided to move back to India and be with my parents, as it was becoming very difficult for them to manage on their own. I attended a retreat in Kerala. Br. Sabu who conducts the retreat invited me to the stage and asked me to jump and run. I experience a complete healing of the knee injury. I ran the entire length of that retreat hall and the freedom that I felt is beyond words. Praise God!!

In the next 3 months, mom's health went from bad to worse and she died of cancer. God was gracious to give me a good 3 months time to spend with mom and take care of her, during her last days.

God says in Isaiah 40:31 "Those who trust in the Lord for help will find their strength renewed. They will rise up on wings like eagles; they will run and not get weary; they will walk and not grow weak."

2 months after mom expired, I came to Bhopal and underwent medical tests; I cleared the medicals and joined the flying academy. God has literally renewed my strength and lifted me up on wings like eagles. Today, after waiting for almost 17 years since I finished my school, I am flying as a pilot trainee in Bhopal flying club and God willing, I will obtain my commercial pilot license in the year 2018.

Now, when I look back, I see God's plan working in my life. Had I started flying right after school, I may have achieved my dreams, but I would not have experienced God's love and would not have learned to depend on God. It was God's plan to bring me to Muscat, into the right fellowship and help me grow in faith and then give me my heart's desire. I Praise God for all his blessings and for working out, his great plans in my life.

- *Lenish Chacko*

Christmas Symbols and Their Meanings

Christmas is filled with symbols, many of which have lost their Christian symbolism in a secular world. Have you ever wondered why people hang tinsel on Christmas trees? Or how candy canes became synonymous with the Christmas? While some symbols may seem arbitrary, many traditional decorations do have a special meaning. Here you will find the Christian meaning of some of the Christmas symbols.

The Colour Red: The first color of Christmas, symbolizing that Savior's sacrifice for all and represents the blood of Jesus when he died on the cross. It's reflected in the color of Holly berries.



The Star is one of the most recognizable symbols of Christmas. It is hard to go anywhere during Christmas without seeing stars hanging around our houses or sitting on top of Christmas trees. The Christmas star, also known as the Star of Bethlehem revealed the birth of Jesus to the three wise men and also guided them to Bethlehem. (Matthew 2:2) also reminds us to follow the light of the Savior just as the Wise Men followed the light of the star to find Him.



Bells were part of the Jewish high priest's garb. (Ex 28:31-35). Christmas bells not only symbolize the joy of Christmas; they also remind us that Christ is the High Priest. Bells are also ancient symbols of protection and ringing them have long been considered a way to ward off negativity. In Christianity the ringing of a bell is a sacred announcement to the presence of Christ at mass.

Poinsettias are Christmas decorations having deep red colored, star shaped leaves, due to which, it is commonly associated with the star of Bethlehem.

All the Christmas presents in the world are worth nothing without the presence of Christ



Legend has it that a few poor children from Mexico wanted to give Jesus a gift. As they could not find any other gift, they picked up some weeds and presented it to Him. Miraculously, the bright red poinsettias bloomed out of these weeds and thus the poinsettias became an integral part of the Christmas tradition.



Holly is an extremely hardy shrub that can be grown in most places, that can withstand temperatures from 110 degrees F to –40 degrees F. Holly plants are noted for their attractive red berries and glossy, sharp-toothed green leaves which remain on the plant year round. The sharp-toothed edge of the holly leaf reminds Christians of the crown of thorns with which the soldiers mocked Our Lord during His Passion. As a Christmas symbol, the red holly berry represents Christ's blood, shed for all people including those who reject Him.



Gifts: Christmas is the season of giving. The wise men who brought their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to honour the infant King in Bethlehem's manger have inspired the concept of gift giving at Christmas. But the greatest gift of all came from our Heavenly Father: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jn 3:16). The Savior is the true gift of Christmas.



Christmas Tree: About the year 1500, inspired by a snow covered fir tree, a small tree was brought indoors and decorated with candles in honor of Christ's birth. By the 18th century, the custom of decorating a Christmas tree was well established in France, Germany, and Austria. Thus, the Christmas tree represents the original Tree of Paradise, the burning bush which spoke to Moses, the branch of Jesse from which Jesus was born, the life-giving tree of the cross of Christ, and the tree which St. John the Apostle saw in the Book of Revelations whose leaves have medicine for the people and which yields fruit each month for the healing of the nations. Because it is green year-round, the evergreen tree represents hope. Its needles and its narrow crest point upward, turning our thoughts to heaven.

Stockings: The tradition of placing gifts into Christmas stockings dates back to St Nicholas, Bishop of Myra. As the legend holds it, the three women who needed dowries in order to be kept from a life of slavery had hung their stockings by the

Jesus was God and man in one person, that God and man might be happy together again



fireplace to dry. When the Saint came by to help them, the money that he threw into their house fortuitously landed in the stockings. Stockings can remind us of the importance of service. The greatest example of service is Jesus Christ. He always “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38).

Mistletoe is an aerial parasite that has no roots of its own. It lives off the tree to which it attaches itself and, without that tree, it would die. Mistletoe is a Christmas symbol of our love which derives from and exists only because God loves us. God, Just as mistletoe may not acknowledge the tree which sustains it, so people may not acknowledge that the love of God sustains them. But if mistletoe were taken from the tree and any person removed from God’s love, both would die.



Candles And Christmas Lights: Candles and Christmas lights represent Christ, the Light of the World. "I am the light of the world. No follower of mine shall ever walk in darkness; no, he shall possess the light of life" (John 8:12). "The light shines on in the darkness, a darkness that did not overcome it" (John 1: 5). Candles and Christmas lights also remind us that we are to be light to others, to show them the way to Christ.



Tinsel are the thin, metallic strands that are used in Christmas decorations. A legend tells of a poor, faithful family who wished to decorate a Christmas tree in honor of the Christ Child but who had no money for decorations. In the night, spiders came and spun webs across the tree. Then the Christ Child, honoring the family's faith, turned the threads into silver. When we want to give our all to Christ, but we think that we have nothing of value to give, God gives value to our offerings.

God does not measure worth by worldly standards but by spiritual ones. Give Christ your all and He will consider it more precious than gold.



Candy Cane: is shaped like a shepherd's crook, reminding us that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, came into our world at Christmas. The red stripe symbolizes Christ's sacrifice and the white background His purity. The candy cane reminds us of Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering servant who was led like a lamb to the slaughter (Is 53:7) and by his stripes you were healed (Is 53:5). The candy cane is meant to be broken and shared, just as Jesus'



Once in our world, a stable had something in it that was bigger than our whole world

Body is broken and shared at every Eucharist.



Gingerbread Man: The gingerbread man does not create himself but rather is created. Gingerbread people remind us of God's creation of Adam in the Garden of Eden, and God's creation of each of us. Spices, reminiscent of those mentioned in the Old Testament, make the gingerbread man the colour of earth (Adam was created from the dust of the earth). God created us for eternal union with Him after we die. Gingerbread people remind us to look beyond ourselves to our Creator with whom we will one day

be united.



Santa Claus: is an alteration of Saint Nicholas, fourth Bishop of Myra (located in modern Turkey) whose feast day is December 6. Saint Nicholas was known for taking to heart Jesus' words about almsgiving. Saint Nicholas was very generous to the poor, but most often anonymously. Saint Nicholas's generosity was transferred to the "jolly old man" who delivers gifts anonymously on Christmas Eve.

Sugar And Christmas Candy: Everyone loves Christmas treats, most often sweetened with sugar. For centuries, only the wealthy used it.



The lower classes used honey or molasses as sweeteners. References to honey are found frequently in Scripture. God promised Abraham that he would bring his people to a "land of milk and honey," that is a rich and fertile homeland. The manna in the desert tasted "like wafers made with honey," a foretaste of the Eucharist which, although not sweetened with honey, is sweet to us spiritually because it is the Body of Christ. The sweets we consume at Christmas remind us of the sweetness of God's Presence, come into the world on Christmas.



Wreath combine several Christmas symbols including holly, fruit, mistletoe, evergreens, tinsel, and so on, all of which retain their symbolism on the wreath. The word wreath comes from an old English word, meaning to writhe or twist. Greens twisted into a circle made "crowns" for kings, military leaders, and athletes. Wreaths, due to their circular shape, symbolize eternity, the circle of life, and endless hope, they began to be used at Christmas and hung. Because a wreath has

neither beginning nor end, but is a continuous circle, it symbolized God Himself.

Christmas Cookies, Breads, Pastries: are made with flour and remind us of the



many uses of bread in Scripture. The Jewish people offered cakes made with oil to the Lord. The Israelites took their unleavened loaves with them when they fled Egypt. The manna in the desert tasted like wafers made with honey. Elijah performed a miracle in which a widow's flour did not run out during a time of famine.



When David brought the Ark of God back to Jerusalem, he gave each person in Israel a loaf of bread, a cut of meat, and a raisin cake. Jesus multiplied loaves twice in Scripture and came as the Bread of Life. He comes to us in every Mass under the form of Eucharistic bread and wine. This rich history is present to us with every taste of

Christmas pastries.



Reindeer: Because Santa Claus, as an alteration of St. Nicholas, was popular in Scandinavia, reindeer became associated with him. In Scandinavian countries, reindeer are domesticated and used for meat as well as for work. Their pulling a sleigh would be a familiar sight. Reindeer provide an interesting example of how the Holy Spirit uses secular symbols to prepare people to accept the Divine.



Sleigh: The sleigh as Santa's means of transporting gifts came from Scandinavia. The word "sleigh" is an altered form of the word "sledge." Sledges were used originally to thresh grain. From Biblical times through modern ones, oxen or donkeys pull sledges across grain which is scattered on a threshing floor. The prophet Isaiah predicts the future glory of

Israel, following the birth of the Messiah, in these words: "Do not fear.. (Is 41: 15)."



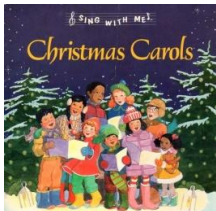
Snow And Ice: Snow and ice are associated with Christmas because December 25 occurs during winter in the Northern hemisphere. There the winter solstice on December 21 brings the shortest day of the year, after which the hours of daylight slowly begin to lengthen. Snow and ice symbolize hardness of heart and coldness toward God and others. As the sun, rising higher in the sky each day after the winter solstice, will eventually melt the ice and snow, so will the Son of God thaw

*Christmas isn't just a temporal celebration or the memory of a beautiful (event);
Christmas is more ... Christmas is an encounter!" – Pope Francis*

our hard hearts if we turn to Him.



Fire: We associate a cozy hearth and a warm fire with Christmas. Fire in Scripture symbolizes sometimes good and sometimes punishment. Fire reminds us the flaming, fiery sword that barred Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Fire and brimstone rained from heaven to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Fire reminds us of the burning bush where God, spoke to Moses. The Holy Spirit, as a pillar of fire, led the Israelites from Egypt into the Promised Land. The Israelites burned their offerings on the temple altar as gifts to God. God sent fire from heaven to consume the offering of Elijah, to the confusion of the prophets of Baal. The prophet Elisha was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire. The Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles in tongues of fire on Pentecost. In the Book of Revelation, the Son of God Who stood before John appeared to be aflame with a spiritual fire, but later satan and all his cohorts were thrown forever into a lake of eternal fire.



Christmas Carols: Christmas carols intended to remind us of the angelic hymns sung in praise of God. The angels announced the birth of Christ by singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth!" Song has been a part of worship since the beginning. Miriam composed and sang a hymn of Thanksgiving when God delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians. David sang and danced before the Ark of the Lord. People use song as an expression of highest emotion. How fitting that we sing about the birth of Christ!!



Christmas Cards began when school children in England drew Christmas greetings for their parents. In 1843, the first director of London's Victoria and Albert Museum commissioned an artist to create the first professional Christmas card so that he could send greetings to his friends. Christmas cards can serve as miniature Gospel tracts, reminding both sender and receiver that Christ was born at Christmas. Christmas cards also remind us that we, too, ought to be "walking and talking" messages that testify to Christ's love.

Angels: are God's messengers. They appear several times in Scripture and continue to protect us today as each person has his or her own guardian angel. The angel Gabriel announced the birth of Christ and also told St. Joseph to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt to escape Herod's plan to kill the Christ Child. Angels

*The greatest gift you will ever receive will never be found under a Christmas tree.
It is far too valuable to be stored in any other place but in the depths of your heart* 10



appeared to the shepherds when Christ was born, singing and praising God and instructing the shepherds to hurry to Bethlehem to see the newborn King. Angels symbolize God's presence, and remind us of obedience to Him and praise of Him.

Hope this list was helpful in enhancing your knowledge about Christmas symbols with meanings. There are many other symbols and beliefs that are associated with the Christmas tradition. This was just a collection of the most popular ones. Having learned this, now you can go ahead ringing the Christmas bells, designing your own Christmas cards, decorating your Christmas tree, and enjoying this festive season in its true sense. Merry Christmas everyone!

- *Compiled*

QUIZ CORNER - Christmas Quiz

Tick (✓) the right answer

1. Who told Mary and Joseph to go to Bethlehem?
a. Angel b. Quirinius c. Caesar Augustus d. Holy Spirit
2. In the accounts announcing the birth of Christ (Mt 1 and Lk 1 & 2) how many times did an angel or angels appear? **a. 2 b. 3 c. 4 d. none**
3. Who decided the date for Christmas would be December 25th:
a. Pope John Paul b. Pope Julius I c. Emperor Constantine d. Pope Clement
4. Who was the King of Judea when John the Baptist and Jesus were born?
a. Herod b. Pilot c. Solomon d. David
5. What does the word Bethlehem mean in Hebrew
a. House of meat b. House of bread c. Hill country d. City of David
6. How do you say Merry Christmas in Spanish?
a. Habla Espanol b. Frohe Weihnachten c. Buon Natale d. Feliz Navidad
7. What is the French name for Santa Claus
a. Pere Noel b. Papa Noel c. Babbo Natale d. Papai Noel
8. Which country does St. Nicholas originally belong to?
a. England b. Italy c. Syria d. Turkey
9. Which country was the first to use the tradition of Christmas trees?
a. France b. Italy c. England d. Germany
10. In which year the first commercial Christmas card was made ?
a. 1764 b. 1843 c. 1856 d. 1902

ANSWERS FOR THE QUIZ ON PATRON SAINTS

1. St. Michael 2. St. Genevieve 3. St. Zita of Lucca 4. St. Wenceslas .

5. St Luke 6. Catherine of Alexandria 7. St. Lawrence 8. St. Eligius
9. Saint Agnes 10. Saint Dorothy 11. Saint Lucy 12. Saint Apollonia

Hearty congratulations to Susan Pinto, Ethel Fernandes, Lauren Fernandes, Juliet Dsouza and Yohan Yesudas for the correct answers.

Wishing every member of The Mary Immaculate Praise Community (MIPC) & Your Families



The Core Team and the Publication Ministry



*MIPC Prayer Meeting: Every Thursday at 8:00 pm in the Parish Hall.
General Intercessory Meeting: First Monday of every month at 8:00 pm.*