Keeping the Christmas Season by Jennifer Gregory Miller

The days building up to the Solemnity of Christmas have been full of expectation and anticipation — and probably full of busy activity. We have counted down the days until Christmas every day in Advent. But Christmas isn't just one day — the climax is spread out for several weeks. This year, 2011, the Christmas season is a longer, lasting 20 days, with the last day of the season being the Baptism of Our Lord on January 13, 2011.

Our family enjoys having a prayer companion and picture study to mark the days of the liturgical seasons. To avoid that letdown, this is a little prayer companion to mark the days of the Christmas season.

In addition to the prayers and thoughts, we're going to try to sing a different Christmas carol for each day of the Christmas season. Not all days have the lyrics to the carol, due to lack of space.

These pages will be kept in a horizontal easel binder, with extra pages of the prayers printed out for everyone's use.



Adoration of the Child, Gerrit van Honthorst, 1620



December 24: Christmas Eve

After attending the vigil Mass, we have a ceremony to place Baby Jesus in the Manger. This is our prayer ceremony; depending on attention span, it will be shortened. We gather in another part of the house, holding the Christ Child, and lighted candles, and process to the manger, singing Silent Night:

Silent Night! Holy Night!

All is calm, all is bright,

'Round yon Virgin Mother and Child.

Holy Infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent Night! Holy Night!
Shepherds quake at the sight!
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia.
Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born!

Silent Night! Holy Night!
Son of God, love's pure light.
Radiant beams from Thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth!

Then a shortened version of the Proclamation of the Birth of Christ is read:

From the Roman Martyrology:

In the twenty-fourth day of the month of December; In the forty-second year of the Empire of Octavian Augustus; In the Sixth Age of the world while all the earth was at peace,

JESUS CHRIST,

Eternal God, and Son of the Eternal Father, willing to consecrate the world by His gracious coming; having been conceived of the Holy Ghost, and the nine months since His conception having now passed (all kneel), was born in Bethlehem of Judah of the Virgin Mary, made man. (Very solemnly):

THE BIRTHDAY ACCORDING TO THE FLESH OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

All: Thanks be to God.

The Christ Child is laid in the manger.

Christmas Eve Prayers (continued)

Father: Our help is in the Name of the Lord

All: who made heaven and earth.

All: The eternal Word, born of the Father before time began, today emptied

himself for our sake and became man.

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for He has looked with favor on His lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me, and Holy is His Name.

He has mercy on those who fear Him in every generation.

He has shown the strength of His arm, He has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of His servant Israel for He has remembered His promise of mercy, the promise He made to our Fathers, to Abraham and His children for ever.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

All: The eternal Word, born of the Father before time began, today emptied himself for our sake and became man.

From the holy Gospel according to St. Luke (2:15-20):

And it came to pass, when the angels had departed from them into heaven, that the shepherds were saying to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste, and they

found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in the manger. And when they had seen, they understood what had been told them concerning this Child. And all who heard marveled at the things told them by the shepherds.

But Mary kept in mind all these words, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, even as it was spoken to them.

The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

Father: The Word was made flesh, alleluia.

All: And dwelt among us, alleluia. **Father:** O Lord, hear my prayer. **All:** And let my cry come to You.

Father: Let us pray. O God, who made this most holy night to shine forth with the brightness of the true Light, grant we beseech Thee, that we who have known the mystery of His light on earth, may attain the enjoyment of His happiness in heaven. Who lives and reigns with Thee forever and ever. **All:** Amen.

Crib Blessing (optional):

Father: Bless, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, this crib (*he sprinkles it with holy water*) which we have prepared in honor of the new birth in the flesh of Thine only begotten Son, that all who devoutly contemplate in this image the mystery of His Incarnation, may be filled with the light of His glory. Who lives and reigns with Thee forever and ever.

All: Amen.

All Sing:

O come all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
To Jesus, to Jesus in Bethlehem.
Come and behold Him,
Born the King of Angels,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ our Lord.

Meal Prayers for the Christmas Season

Before Breakfast

Leader: Glory to God in the highest!

All: And on earth peace to men of good will, alleluia!

Leader: The Lord has reigned,

All: And He is clothed with beauty.

Leader: O Almighty God, the Savior of the world, who hast nourished

After Breakfast

us with heavenly food, we give Thee thanks for the gift of this bodily refreshment which we have received from Thy bountiful

mercy. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Leader: The Word was made flesh, alleluia, alleluia!

All: And dwelt among us, alleluia, alleluia!

Leader: Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad,

All: Before the face of the Lord, for He comes.

Leader: Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which we are about to

receive from Thy bounty. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Before Dinner

Leader: All the ends of the earth have seen, alleluia!

All: The Salvation of our God, alleluia!

Leader: Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

All: The Lord is God and He has shone upon us.

Leader: Unto us a child is born, Alleluia

All: A Son is given to us, Alleluia.

Leader: Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which we are about to

receive from Thy bounty. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

After Dinner

Leader: The goodness of God our Savior has appeared.

All: Not by the works of Justice which we have done, but according

to His mercy, He saved us.

Leader: A sanctified day has shone upon us, alleluia!

All: Come, you nations, and adore the Lord!

Leader: Let us pray. Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that the

new birth in the flesh of Thine only-begotten Son may set us free, whom the old bondage holds under the yoke of sin.

Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Leader: We give Thee thanks, Almighty God, for these and all Thy gifts,

which we have received from Thy bounty. Who livest and

reignest world without end.

All: Amen.

Christmas Night Prayers at the Crib

Father: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Father: Our help is in the Name of the Lord.

All: Who made heaven and earth.

Father: Let us think over whether our actions during the day have done honor

to the Christ-Child (pause).

Let us ask forgiveness for what we have not done as we should.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name; Thy kingdom come: Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

All: Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

All: This day Christ is born; this day the Savior has appeared; this day angels are singing on earth, archangels are rejoicing. This day the just are glad and say, Glory to God in high heaven, alleluia.

All Pray: (Psalm 134)

Come, bless the Lord, * all you servants of the Lord.

Who stand in the house of the Lord * during the hours of the night.

Lift up your hands toward the sanctuary * and bless the Lord.

May the Lord bless you from Sion, * the maker of heaven and earth.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son * and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, * world without end.

Amen.

All: (Repeat antiphon preceding psalm.)

Mother or Eldest Child: (Lesson from Jeremiah): You are in our midst, Lord, and Your holy Name has been invoked upon us. Do not forsake us, O Lord our God. The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Father: Into Your hands, O Lord, * I commend my spirit.

All: Into Your hands, O Lord, * I commend my spirit.

Father: For You have redeemed us, O Lord, God of truth.

All: I commend my spirit.

Father: Glory be to the Father and to the Son

and to the Holy Spirit.

All: Into Your hands, O Lord, * I commend my spirit.

Father: Keep us, O Lord, as the apple of Your eye. **All:** Shelter us under the shadow of Your wings.

Canticle of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32)

Lord, now you let your servant go in peace; Your word has been fulfilled:

my own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people:

a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, * world without end. Amen.

Father: O Lord, hear my prayer.

All: And let my cry come to You.

Father: Let us pray. Visit this dwelling, we beseech Thee, O Lord, and drive far from it all snares of the enemy. Let Thy holy Angels dwell herein, who may keep us in peace, and let Thy blessing be always upon us. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Father: Let us remember the saints who come with us today to show their love for the Christ-Child.

(The Collect or some other appropriate part of the Mass of the day is read.) Let us now sing a carol to the Christ-Child so that He may rest peacefully with us this night.

Night prayers end with a favorite carol.



Adoration of the Shepherds, Agnolo Bronzino, 1539-40

December 25: Solemnity of the Birth of Jesus Christ

The Word was made flesh, alleluia, alleluia!

And dwelt among us, alleluia, alleluia!

O Little Town of Bethlehem

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie! Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by. Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light; The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above, While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love. O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth, And praises sing to God the King, and peace to men on earth!

How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is giv'n; So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His Heav'n. No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin, Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.

Where children pure and happy pray to the blessèd Child, Where misery cries out to Thee, Son of the mother mild; Where charity stands watching and faith holds wide the door, The dark night wakes, the glory breaks, and Christmas comes once more.

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray; Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell; O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!



The Holy Family, Juan Simón Gutiérrez

December 26: Feast of the Holy Family

The first Sunday in the octave of Christmas is the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Normally this would be the feast of St. Stephen, the first martyr, also known as Boxing Day. Today we meditate on the Holy Family and pray for help to imitate their virtues in our home. See the readings of today, especially the second reading from Paul to the Colossians 3:12-21.

Prayer to the Holy Family

Lord Jesus Christ, who, being made subject to Mary and Joseph, didst consecrate domestic life by Thine ineffable virtues; grant that we, with the assistance of both, may be taught by the example of Thy Holy Family and may attain to its everlasting fellowship. Who lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Besides this carol, another appropriate hymn would be *Where Charity and Love Prevail* or *Ubi Caritas*.

Once In Royal David's City

- 1. Once in royal David's city Stood a lowly cattle shed, Where a mother laid her Baby In a manger for His bed: Mary was that mother mild, Jesus Christ her little Child.
- 2. He came down to earth from heaven,
 Who is God and Lord of all,
 And His shelter was a stable,
 And His cradle was a stall;
 With the poor, and mean, and lowly,
 Lived on earth our Savior holy.
- 3. And through all His wondrous childhood
 He would honor and obey,
 Love and watch the lowly maiden,
 In whose gentle arms He lay:
 Christian children all must be
 Mild, obedient, good as He.
- 4. Jesus is our childhood's pattern;
 Day by day, like us He grew;
 He was little, weak and helpless,
 Tears and smiles like us He knew;
 And He feeleth for our sadness,
 And He shareth in our gladness



Stoning of St. Stephen, 1447-1449, Fra Angelico

Honoring St. Stephen, Martyr:

Father: Christ, the New-born, today crowned blessed Stephen.

All: Come, let us adore Him.

Mother: Stephen, full of grace and power, was working great wonders and

signs among the people.

All: Thanks be to God.

Father: You crowned him with glory and honor, O Lord.

All: You have given him rule over the works of Your hands.

Father: Let us pray. Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that we may imitate

him whose memory we celebrate, so as to learn to love even our enemies; because we now solemnize his martyrdom who knew how to pray even for his persecutors to our Lord Jesus Christ Thy Son,

who lives and reigns forever. Alleluia.

All: Alleluia.

Good King Wenceslas

1. Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the feast of Stephen
When the snow lay round about
Deep and crisp and even
Brightly shone the moon that night
Though the frost was cruel
When a poor man came in sight
Gath'ring winter fuel
2. "Hither, page, and stand by me

If thou know'st it, telling
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?"
"Sire, he lives a good league hence
Underneath the mountain
Right against the forest fence
By Saint Agnes' fountain."

3. "Bring me flesh and bring me wine Bring me pine logs hither Thou and I will see him dine When we bear him thither." Page and monarch forth they went Forth they went together Through the rude wind's wild lament

And the bitter weather.

4. "Sire, the night is darker now And the wind blows stronger Fails my heart, I know not how, I can go no longer."

"Mark my footsteps, my good page Tread thou in them boldly Thou shalt find the winter's rage Freeze thy blood less coldly."

5. In his master's steps he trod Where the snow lay dinted Heat was in the very sod Which the Saint had printed Therefore, Christian men, be sure Wealth or rank possessing Ye who now will bless the poor Shall yourselves find blessing.



Apostle St. John the Evangelist, 1610-1614, El Greco

December 27: Feast of St. John, Evangelist and Apostle

St. John was the youngest apostle of Jesus, the brother of St. James the Greater. He wrote the fourth Gospel, and mentions himself as the "disciple whom Jesus loved" or the "beloved disciple." St. John is the only apostle who was not martyred, but he did suffer beating, poisoning, and boiling in oil, of which he all miraculously survived. For his feast the priest wears white; all other feasts of apostles the priest wears red.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* mentions that "early Christian art usually represents St. John with an eagle, symbolizing the heights to which he rises in the first chapter of his Gospel. The chalice as symbolic of St. John...is sometimes interpreted with reference to the Last Supper, again as connected with the legend according to which St. John was handed a cup of poisoned wine, from which, at his blessing, the poison rose in the shape of a serpent."

St. John, who spent most of his life teaching the main precept of Jesus "Little children, love one another" (from Jerome, *Comm. in ep. ad. Gal.,* vi, 10). On this day we drink to the love of St. John. The *Roman Ritual* includes a blessing of wine. At the family meal, serve wine for the adults, another drink for the children. The father leads the blessing for the wine:

Let us pray. Lord God, bless + and consecrate + this vessel of wine (or any other beverage) by the power of your right hand; and grant that, through the merits of St. John, apostle and evangelist, all your faithful who drink of it may find it a help and a protection. As the blessed John drank the poisoned potion without any ill effects, so may all who today drink the blessed wine in his honor be delivered from poisoning and similar harmful things. And as they offer themselves body and soul to you, may they obtain pardon of all their sins; through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Afterwards, the father pours a glass of wine, passes it to the mother and says "Drink to the love of St. John" and the mother answers "I thank you for the love of St. John" or "Where love is, there is God." Cups are then handed around the table the greeting is repeated by different members and guests.

Sing God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen today.



The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin: The Flight into Egypt, c. 1496, Albrecht Dürer

(Note: The depictions of the massacre of the Holy Innocents are too graphic and disturbing even for me, so I'm picturing the Flight.)

December 28: Feast of the Holy Innocents

The Holy Innocents are the boy babies that Herod had killed when he was trying to find Baby Jesus. From Matthew's Gospel comes the story (Mt 2:16-18). And an angel appeared in a dream to St. Joseph and told him to take Mary and the child Jesus into Egypt to escape Herod. These young boys are the first to die for Christ; Jesus' life was spared because they gave theirs. Today there is a blessing for children, and the parents can remember to bless their children every night with a sign of the Cross on their forehead.

Blessing of Children

Father: O Lord, hear my prayer.

All: And let my cry come unto You.

Father: Let us pray. O Lord Jesus Christ, once You embraced and placed Your

hands upon the little children who came to You, and said: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, and their angels always see the face of my Father!" Look now with fatherly eyes on the innocence of these children and their parents' devotion, and bless them this day through our ministry. (*The father signs the forehead of each child with the sign of the cross.*) In Your grace and goodness let them advance continually, longing for You, loving You, fearing You, keeping Your commandments. Then they will surely come to their destined home, through You, Savior of the world. Who lives and reigns forever and ever.

All: Amen

Father: May God bless you. And may He keep your hearts and mind—the

Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen

The father then sprinkles the children with holy water.

Coventry Carol (Lullay, Thou Little Tiny Child)

Lully, Iullay, Thou little tiny Child, By, by, Iully, Iullay.

1. O sisters too, how may we do, For to preserve this day

This poor Youngling for Whom we sing

By, by, lully, lullay?

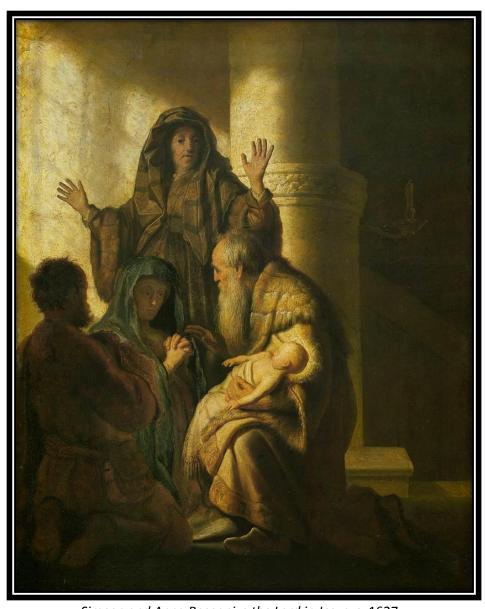
2. Herod the king, in his raging, Charged he hath this day His men of might, in his own sight, All young children to slay. 3. Then woe is me, poor Child, for Thee, And ever mourn and say;

For Thy parting nor say nor sing,

By, by, lully, lullay.

Lully, Iullay, Thou little tiny Child,

By, by, lully, lullay.



Simeon and Anna Recognize the Lord in Jesus, c. 1627, Harmenszoon van Rijn Rembrandt Oil on wood

December 29: 5th Day in the Octave of Christmas

St. Thomas Becket Check the readings

The Church celebrates the first eight days, or octave of Christmas, as every day a little Christmas. There is another octave at Easter. The difference between the two octaves is the Christmas octave includes a few other feast days within the octave, but Easter has none. The Christmas octave includes the feasts of St. Stephen, St. John Evangelist, Holy Innocents, and the Holy Family. New Year's day, which is the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, is the final day of the Christmas octave. Except for Christmas, Holy Family, and Mary, Mother of God, the first reading is taken from the First Letter of St. John the Evangelist.

Today is the first day of the octave that does not have another feast attached to it. The Gospel today is the Presentation in the Temple, Luke 2:22-35

And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel."

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

Sing God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen today.



December 30: 6th Day in the Octave of Christmas

Today the Gospel concludes the Presentation in the Temple story, including Anna, the prophetess. (Luke 2:26-30):

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Angels We Have Heard on High

1. Angels we have heard on high Sweetly singing o'er the plains, And the mountains in reply Echoing their joyous strains.

Refrain: Gloria, in excelsis Deo! Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

- 2. Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong? What the gladsome tidings be Which inspire your heavenly song? Refrain
- 3. Come to Bethlehem and see Christ Whose birth the angels sing; Come, adore on bended knee, Christ the Lord, the newborn King. Refrain
- 4. See Him in a manger laid, Whom the choirs of angels praise; Mary, Joseph, lend your aid, While our hearts in love we raise. *Refrain*

Adoration of the Shepherds, 1539-40, Agnolo Bronzino



The Nativity, 1508-1519, Juan de Flandes Oil on Panel

December 31: 7th Day in the Octave of Christmas

St. Sylvester's Eve

What Child is This?

write clina is this.	
1. What Child is this who, laid to rest On Mary's lap is sleeping? Whom Angels greet with anthems sweet, While shepherds watch are keeping?	3. So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh, Come peasant, king to own Him; The King of kings salvation brings, Let loving hearts enthrone Him.
This, this is Christ the King, Whom shepherds guard and Angels sing; Haste, haste, to bring Him laud, The Babe, the Son of Mary.	Raise, raise a song on high, The virgin sings her lullaby. Joy, joy for Christ is born, The Babe, the Son of Mary.
2. Why lies He in such mean estate, Where ox and ass are feeding? Good Christians, fear, for sinners here The silent Word is pleading.	
Nails, spear shall pierce Him through, The cross be borne for me, for you. Hail, hail the Word made flesh, The Babe, the Son of Mary.	