



SPiRIT

PRAY Gather in a circle, sitting in comfortable chairs, on the floor, or wherever works in your space.

LEADER: In Mary the Word became flesh and made home among us. We gather together to reflect how we can give you, God, birth in our lives and make a home for you in our families, school, neighborhoods, our world.

Proclaim the gospel drama.

LEADER: Mary's yes gave flesh to God.

ALL: God, make your home with us. We want to give you birth among us.

LEADER: Some of us are homeless this Christmas and living in shelters.

ALL: God, make your home with us. We want to give you birth among us.

LEADER: Some of us think the Christmas spirit is something we can buy, wrap up, and give.

ALL: God, make your home with us. We want to give you birth among us.

LEADER: Some of us can't read or write. Some of us feel discouraged about school.

ALL: God, make your home with us. We want to give you birth among us.

LEADER: Some of us have parents who drink or batter. Some of us hate Christmas because it's the time we realize how messed up our families are and how perfect others seem.

ALL: God, make your home with us. We want to give you birth among us.

Add your own prayers. End with a greeting of peace and a Christmas song.



by Johanna Hatch

I have come to expect certain traditions in my family at Christmas time: Christmas Eve pasta feasts, midnight Mass, cinnamon rolls for breakfast, and the hundred-dollar Christmas rule. For years I resented the hundred-dollar rule, but now I love it with all my favorite holiday traditions.

I don't exactly remember how old I was when my mother announced, "We are doing away with the Christmas madness."

She had decided that the materialism of the world and the "gimmies" of us kids had gone too far. She had to take drastic measures.

"From now on I am limiting how much I spend for Christmas to \$100 per child," she said. "We have enough cheap, plastic junk."

She was right really. With a teenager and three little kids in the house, we had all the great toys (many in constant need of batteries) indoors and out. We all had enough clothes to see us through the winter. But I still bristled at the idea. Just \$100 per kid?

My best friend Amy got a new wardrobe and a stack of CDs every year for Christmas. I knew exactly

how far \$100 would go in the Delia's catalogue. I knew I might get one outfit, not including shoes.

As the hundred-dollar Christmas idea got into full swing, my mother showed how creative and inventive she was. Second-hand toys from yard sales we had been to in July began to appear beneath the tree. Her rule extended not just to us kids but to other family members, too. I remember coming home to jugs of homemade herb vinegar lining the kitchen wall and homemade pasta with bits of rosemary from the garden drying along the backs of the dining room chairs. These would be Christmas gifts for my aunts and uncles.

Naturally my mother tried to include us kids in her craftiness. I spent many an Advent evening painting ornaments and birdhouses

The
Hundred-Dollar
Christmas



for my grandmothers, thinking how weird my mom was, and how I should be banking on something more like Amy's Christmas.

Much as I resisted, my mother never gave up on me. She kept trying to make me see the value in limiting our spending, creating our own gifts, and shopping creatively. But I didn't want something useful for Christmas. I wanted something that I wanted. I didn't want to make presents for my friends; I wanted to go to the mall with Amy and buy things.

As time has gone on, my mother's hundred-dollar Christmas has become more social justice oriented. She still seeks out second-hand toys, but in addition to saving money, she also makes certain that the money she spends is not going to companies with unfair labor practices. She points out that "recycling" toys reduces landfill waste. She seeks out gifts that are fair trade, made in the United States, or have part of their cost donated to a charity that is important to us. By spending less money and buying fewer things, she is reducing the amount of waste our family creates.

It has taken a while, but I have come to realize how very special our tradition is. Because of our

hundred-dollar Christmases, Christmas is no longer about what I can get, but about spending time with my family. It has caused me to consider what I need as opposed to what I want.

Upon "growing up" and looking back on our hundred-dollar Christmases, I now know that the hundred-dollar limit grew, in part, out of necessity. Our family was going through rough times when it first began. It probably challenged my mother's ingenuity to scrimp and pinch pennies all year long in order to save \$100 for each of us four kids from an already tight budget. Simply put, we could barely afford to spend \$100 on each child. Yet she never told us that. When she announced the rule, she framed it as a choice: choosing to give up the materialism that has consumed the season instead of getting sucked into thinking only about what you can get.

It's not easy to get away from the messages telling us that Christmas is about presents and that bigger and more are always better. Commercials tell us to "Dream Big" for Christmas with new flat screen HD TVs. Magazine spreads with the "ideal gifts for everyone" have pictures of Wii game systems, Vespa scooters, and Coach bags. Our spiritual connection to the season becomes whether the cashiers at big box stores say, "Merry Christmas," or "Happy Holidays."

The season starts earlier every year with Christmas wreaths and Christmas sales creeping into the malls before Halloween. We pack ourselves into malls, watch grown men and women fight over the last best-toy-of-the-year, and rack up credit-card debt to buy



Young people from Santiago de Compostela Catholic Church in Lake Forest, California, answer this question.

What is your best family Christmas tradition that doesn't cost money?

My family loves the smell of a real Christmas tree but because I have asthma, we can't decorate a tree too early in our house. So, long ago, we bought a small fake tree that we decorate with ornaments we made in school, Girl Scouts, home, and Sunday school. One year my sister made an angel tree topper out of a purple cup and white paper. We still use that topper. We keep this tree in our living room where everyone can see it. It has happy memories! We get a real tree later.

Jennifer M.

Hanging Christmas lights with my family is my favorite Christmas tradition. It is a time for me to reminisce about my past years because many of the ornaments on our tree were handmade by my young, elementary school fingers. Furthermore, it is a time for my family and I to bond, taking time out of our busy schedules.



Justine S.



Philip B.

We always get all of our family together for dinner. It really gives us a reason to be thankful on Christmas day.

We go to the same relatives' house every year to spend time with each other. We play games and watch movies. We have fun spending time around the dinner table because there is always plenty of food to go around. Usually there is karaoke.



Jessica B.

SUNDAY GOSPEL

4th Sunday of Advent

Elizabeth welcomes Mary.

NARRATOR 1: Mary set out with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

NARRATOR 2: When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby stirred in her womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and cried out in a loud voice:

ELIZABETH: Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. But who am I that the mother of God should come to me? As soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who trusted that the words of the Holy One to her would be fulfilled.

Luke 1.39-45

the biggest, the best, the newest, the coolest, which by next year will be none of those things.

The madness is exhausting. No wonder people get depressed during the holiday season; it's nearly impossible to keep up.

I know. I've been guilty of trying for the latest and best, too, even after my conversion to the hundred-dollar Christmas. By the time I get home, I'm usually feeling guilty because the gifts I bring are probably made in a sweatshop by people who won't even get Christmas off from work. But no one is perfect. The whole point for me is to stop, think, and not rush to buy, to know what my limits are and consider where my money is going.

At this point in my life, I can say that I am thankful for what my mother has taught me about Christmas through her hundred-dollar rule. Even though I still hear my friends talk about their fabulous gifts, I am content because I know how many gifts I do have that can never have a price tag: my family and friends, my health, my faith, and my education. My mother has given me a gift worth far more than any fabulous wardrobe I can imagine: she gave me the gift of being grateful every day of the year.

And new pink long underwear, which I know she got a good deal on.

Thanks Mom!

QUESTIONS

- 1 How would the hundred-dollar rule work in your family? Should the dollar amount be changed? How can your family cut back on Christmas spending?
- 2 What free or inexpensive Christmas traditions does your family or community practice?
- 3 For what gifts from your family are you most grateful?
- 4 What does Elizabeth see happening in Mary?
- 5 How is Mary blessed?
- 6 Who recognizes the Spirit at work in you?

We enjoy one another's company by having a family reunion. We tell stories and dance with the little children. We stay up till exactly midnight to pray, thanking the Lord for all of creation. We celebrate another year of Jesus' birthday.



Sandy D.

My favorite tradition is spending time with my whole family. My family means a lot to me and some come to visit from far away.



Marisol B.



Josh M.

We meet up at my grandparents' house and just hang out.

Every year, my family visits different family members living around California. At their houses, we eat great food, sing karaoke, and sometimes even open presents. The house is full of loud, happy people just focused on celebrating the holiday. It is a chance to relax and laugh without having to worry about work or school.



Maddy B.

We come together, drag out tons of ornaments that describe each one of us, and spend one afternoon together celebrating and decorating our unique Christmas tree. Throughout the whole season we admire our tree—a symbol of our family and unity.



Bryan A.

Mom tells us the Nativity story.



Danielle C.

Going to look at Christmas lights is our best tradition.

We all get together on Christmas Eve and have a BBQ. My mom and grandma make a special punch out of some fruits my uncle brings from his garden. About 11:30 we pray, and at midnight we open presents.



Eric R.



Jade S.

Mary believes God's word.

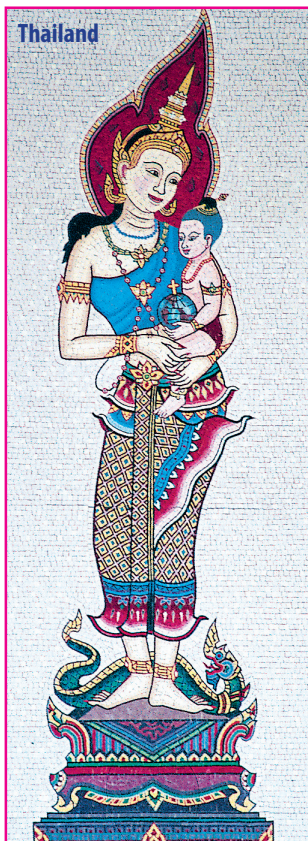
The name for the mystery of God becoming human in Jesus is incarnation. The word incarnation means in-flesh-ment. When we pray the Nicene Creed at weekend Eucharists, we proclaim our faith that Jesus is both the Son of God and the son of the virgin Mary.

In the early fifth century, some people disagreed. A great controversy began in the Church over a small incident. At Mass the Empress Pulcheria usually stepped into the sanctuary to receive communion.

In A.D. 428 a priest named Nestorius became Bishop and Patriarch of Constantinople, where the Empress lived and worshiped. Nestorius refused to give the Empress communion in the sanctuary because she was a woman.

Pulcheria insisted, "Did I not give birth to God?" By this she meant, "Do I not have the same dignity as Mary, the woman who gave birth to God?"

Nestorius taught against calling Mary by the Greek title Theotokos, which means God-bearer. He also thought that the title Mother of God was a total contradiction.



The word mother and the act of giving birth belonged to the material, physical world. God, on the contrary, belonged to the eternal, spiritual world. God could not be born or have a mother, according to Nestorius. He taught that God only appeared human in Jesus.

In A.D. 431, a council of bishops met at Ephesus and decided that Nestorius was wrong. In Jesus, God's Son had become human. Jesus was truly human and truly God. Mary was the Mother of God.

The Empress Pulcheria and the people of Ephesus processed through the streets, joyfully proclaiming Mary, "Theotokos," expressing their faith that Mary had indeed given birth to God's Son, that God had become incarnate in Jesus.

In Sunday's gospel Elizabeth recognizes that her young kinswoman Mary is a deeply spiritual girl. "Blessed are you among women," Elizabeth says to Mary. "Blessed is the fruit of your womb; blessed is she who trusts God's words will be fulfilled."

In answer Mary prays a song that has stayed on the Top-40 prayer charts for 2,000 years. Sometimes the prayer is called, "Mary's Song," sometimes the Magnificat, after its first word in Latin.



Mary truly became the Mother of God by the human conception of the Son of God in her womb.

Catechism of the Catholic Church #466

Mary's Song

My life proclaims the greatness of God.
My spirit finds joy in God who saved me.
God has looked upon me
in my lowliness;
all ages to come shall call me blessed.
God who is mighty
has done great things for me.

Holy is God's name.
Mercy is God's hand
upon all who fear the Holy One.
Strength is God's arm.

God has confused the proud
in their inmost thoughts;
God has put down the mighty
from their thrones and raised up the lowly to
high places.
The hungry God gives good things.
The rich God sends away empty.
God remembers the promises
to our ancestors Abraham and Sarah.

Luke 1.46-55

FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Read "Mary's Song." What promises does Mary believe?
- 2 What is the spirit of Mary's song?
- 3 What is a way you can lift up the lowly or feed the hungry in the spirit of Mary's song this Christmas?
- 4 Contrast the spirit of Mary's song with songs pop stars are singing this Christmas.

GoodGroundPress.com