

Saints for ADVENT & CHRISTMAS



Becoming CHRISTS for Others

INTRODUCTION

As Christians, Jesus calls each of us to “follow” him, which means not just going along with him but imitating him. After his death, he commissioned us to carry on his work to transform the world into God’s kingdom of justice, love and peace. We continue his work today by imitating him and becoming Christs for others—embodying in our words and actions a Jesus-like life. The saints whose memorials we celebrate in this Advent/Christmas season are examples of persons who became Christ for others. And there is something for everyone to imitate in their diversity—young and old, rich and poor, with and without formal education, apostles, popes, bishops, priests, deacons, lay men and women, a gospel writer, missionaries, teachers, administrators, pastors, and even murdered innocent children. Their examples remind us that there are many different ways to follow Jesus, and our challenge is to do it our way.

—*Steve Mueller*

December 3

ST. FRANCIS XAVIER

PRIEST (1506–1552)

One of the original seven members of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), Francis was sent as a missionary to the East Indies and Japan (1540). He spent his time preaching, instructing, baptizing and establishing missions for those who were to follow him. He spent countless hours ministering to the sick and the poor, living with them, sharing their food and simple lifestyle. His preaching and example led to hundreds of thousands of converts.



He died on his way to China where he had dreamed of evangelizing. Canonized in 1602, he is the patron of all foreign missions. May we share his eagerness to disregard any artificial boundaries that keep others from helping others to find Christ.

What boundaries must I overcome to reach out to others this Advent?

December 4

ST. JOHN OF DAMASCUS, PRIEST & DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH (C. 675–750)

Born in Damascus, after a classical and theological education he accepted a government position with the ruling Arabs, which he resigned to become a monk and later a priest in the monastery of St. Sabas, near Jerusalem. The last of the



Greek Fathers of the Church, John was a renowned homilist (nicknamed the “golden speaker”) and scholar whose summary of theology *The Fountain of Wisdom*, especially its *Exposition of the Orthodox*

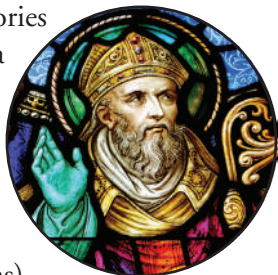
Faith, greatly influenced many later theologians. He was also well-known for his beautiful poetic prayers. He was named doctor of the Church (1890). May we follow his encouragement that “the one who seeks God continually will find God, for God is in everything.”

*How have I sought and discovered God
anew during this Advent?*

December 6

ST. NICHOLAS, BISHOP (D. C. 350)

Although we know little about his life, Nicholas became Bishop of Myra in southwest Turkey (c. 300), was imprisoned during Diocletian's persecution (303–305) and attended the first ecumenical council at Nicaea (325). Famous for his pastoral care, the many legendary stories of his charitable deeds (like a secret gift of 3 bags of gold to a poor father for his 3 daughters' dowries) became the basis for the figure of the gift-giving Santa Claus (a name derived from St. Nicholas).



He is one of the most popular saints in both the Roman and the Orthodox Churches. May we imitate his love of children, his care for the poor and his spirit of giving.

*What gifts might I prepare and share with those
in need to make this Christmas special?*

December 7

ST. AMBROSE,
BISHOP & DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH
(339–397)

As Roman governor he mediated a disputed election for bishop of Milan (370) and the people acclaimed him bishop though he was not baptized. He excelled in law, literature and rhetoric, and was a renowned



preacher, teacher and pastor. He famously stood up to the Roman emperor for interfering in Church doctrine and practice. He also influenced the conversion of St. Augustine, whom he baptized (386). He

was named one of the four great doctors of the Latin Church (1298). May we say with him, “Thanks be to the gospel, by means of which we also, who did not see Christ when he came into this world, seem to be with him when we read his deeds.”

*What am I doing to learn more about Jesus
and his gospel message during this Advent season?*

December 9

ST. JUAN DIEGO, HERMIT (1474–1548)

On this day in 1531, the Blessed Virgin appeared to native Mexican peasant and convert Juan Diego (his Indian name was Cuauhtlatohuac, “The eagle who speaks”) at Guadalupe, near Mexico City. She told him that a church should be built where she appeared. When the bishop questioned Juan’s account, Mary told Juan to gather some flowers and give them to the bishop. When he did so, roses fell from his cloak, revealing a painted image of the Lady of Guadalupe. This relic is now preserved in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe (her feast is December 12). Juan Diego was canonized in 2002. May we imitate his eager faith to build up the Church despite obstacles.



*What obstacles to my growth in faith
can I ask Mary to help me overcome?*



December 11

ST. DAMASUS I,
POPE (C. 304–384)

Damasus became pope (366) and during his pontificate Christianity was declared the official religion of the Roman state (380). He made Latin the language of the liturgy and commissioned his secretary Jerome to translate the Bible into Latin. May we imitate his love of scripture and his concern that everyone read it in their own language.

How might I begin this Advent to make scripture a greater part of my reading, prayer and daily life?



December 13

ST. LUCY,
VIRGIN & MARTYR (D. 304)

Lucy was born to a noble family in Syracuse, Sicily. Secretly she became a Christian to devote her whole life to Christ. She made a vow never to marry and gave away her dowry to feed the poor. Her spurned fiancé reported her to the authorities as a Christian and she was martyred. May we share her courage to witness to Christ with our lives.

How might I give greater witness to Christ the light of the world during this Advent season?

December 14

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS, PRIEST & DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH (1542–1591)

Born in poverty, at 21 John entered the Carmelites and was ordained a priest (1567). With St. Teresa of Avila he helped reform his order and create the reformed (Discalced) Carmelites. But his reforms were opposed and he was persecuted and imprisoned for almost a year (1575). Canonized in 1726, he was named a doctor of the Church (1926). In his best-known works, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, and *The Living Flame of Love*, John describes the spiritual life as a journey of the soul to divine union. May we realize as he did that “My spirit has become dry because it forgets to feed on You.”



*How has my Advent prayer and action
most helped me on my journey to God?*

December 21

ST. PETER CANISIUS,
PRIEST AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH
(1521–1597)

Born in Holland, he joined the Jesuits (1543) and worked in southern Germany, Austria, Bohemia and Switzerland as a leader of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. Noted for his scholarship and theological insight, his preaching and teaching, he developed popular and influential catechisms



for both adults and children. He established such excellent schools that “even the Protestants” sent their sons there and his courtesy and learning commanded the respect even of his opponents. He was canonized and declared doctor of the Church (1925). May we imitate his tireless efforts to help others know Christ and discover his secret that “If you have too much to do, with God’s help you will find time to do it all.”

How might I find more time to help others during this busy time of preparing for Christmas?

December 23

ST. JOHN OF KANTY, PRIEST (1390–1473)

John was born in Kanty, Poland. After excelling in studies and being ordained a priest, he taught theology and scripture at Krakow University for many years. A popular teacher and preacher, he was noted for his simple lifestyle and love for the poor, especially needy university students to whom he was always giving his money and goods. He was buried in the Collegiate Church of St. Anne, where his tomb became and remains a popular pilgrimage site. He was named patron of Poland (1737) and canonized (1767). May we learn to imitate his example to “Fight all error, but do it with good humor, patience, kindness, and love.”



*How might I share my goods with those most
in need at this holy time?*

December 26

ST. STEPHEN, FIRST MARTYR (D. C. 33)

His story is told in Acts chapters 6–7. He is the first-named among the 7 deacons (Greek: servant) chosen by the 12 apostles to minister to the Greek-speaking Christians in the Jerusalem community. When the Jews accused him of blasphemy, he eloquently de-



fended himself by recalling God's guidance throughout Israel's history, as well as Israel's idolatry and disobedience, which he claimed his persecutors were now imitating. Stoned to death by an angry mob (which included Saul, later St.

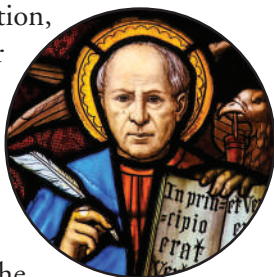
Paul), he is the first recorded martyr of the New Testament and patron saint of deacons. Like him, may we learn to forgive our persecutors and pray "Lord, Jesus, receive my spirit!"

*How might I show forgiveness to my persecutors
as Stephen did to his?*

December 27

ST. JOHN, APOSTLE & EVANGELIST (D. C. 100)

All we know about the apostle John is from the Gospels and Paul's letters. Like Peter, John and his brother James, the sons of Zebedee, were called from their family fishing business to follow Jesus. They were present at the transfiguration, the raising of Jairus's daughter and Jesus' agony in the garden, and after Jesus' death were important figures in the Jerusalem community. Catholic tradition identified the apostle John as the author of the gospel, the Book of Revelation, and the 3 letters of John. But modern biblical scholars believe that the apostle, the evangelist and the author of Revelation were 3 different persons. May we use our skills as John the apostle and as John the evangelist did to make Jesus known to his followers.



*How might I draw others more closely
to Jesus through my words and actions today?*

December 28

THE HOLY INNOCENTS, MARTYRS (D. C. 4 BC)

Today's feast commemorates the boys slain instead of Jesus by King Herod the Great (Mt 2:16-18) to eliminate the threat to his throne from the newborn king. In contrast to the Magi's welcome, Herod's



murderous rage foreshadows the opposition that Jesus will later meet, culminating in his crucifixion by the Romans. To escape Herod's massacre, the holy family became refugees in Egypt. This unique episode also echoes Moses' rescue from

the slaughter of the Hebrew children by the Pharaoh (Ex 2:1-10). Like a new Moses, Jesus will lead his people on a new exodus journey into God's promised kingdom. May we do all we can to lessen the suffering of children and refugees.

What might I do today to help innocent children who are neglected, abandoned, beaten and killed today?

December 29

ST. THOMAS BECKET, BISHOP & MARTYR (1118–1170)

Born in London, he was ordained a deacon (1154), named Lord Chancellor of England (1155) and Archbishop of Canterbury (1162) by King Henry II. After disagreeing with the king on the Church's independence, he fled to France (1164). After his return (1170), he and the king clashed again. In a fit of rage, the king wished aloud to be rid of this “lowborn priest” and 4 of the king's men took this as a command and murdered Thomas in Canterbury cathedral. He was quickly declared a saint (1173), and Canterbury became a popular pilgrimage site. May we imitate his willingness to change his life to live fully his responsibility to Christ and others.



How might better live my Christian faith when it is challenged by political and cultural practices today?

December 31

ST. SYLVESTER I, POPE (D. 335)

Sylvester was elected pope (314) shortly after the emperor Constantine's Edict of Milan (313) which for the first time granted the Christian religion official recognition and allowed public worship. During his 21 year pontificate as formal



Church and state relations began to develop, large public churches like St. John Lateran were built by the emperor and other benefactors. The first world-wide (ecumenical) council of bishops was also held

at Nicaea (325) near Constantinople to address the issue of Jesus' divinity provoked by Arius, although Sylvester did not attend because of old age. Like him, may we discover ways to use our religious values and beliefs to improve society.

*How might I better embody my Christian values
in my everyday actions this coming year?*