



Chaplains' Newsletter

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The Office of Campus Ministry
King's University College
266 Epworth Avenue
London, ON N6A 2M3
1-800-265-4406 / 519-963-1477 / campusministry@uwo.ca

CELEBRATING THE SEASONS: ADVENT & CHRISTMAS

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My brief experience in high school chaplaincy and my last nine years at King's University College has shown me that Advent is a horribly neglected season. In the brief time that we have in the classroom prior to Christmas break, we are preoccupied with dances, semi-formals, food drives, Christmas shopping, the occasional exam and a great deal of drama as relationships are ended and new ones are birthed.

Advent is and always has been a period of preparation and joy filled anticipation. There is so much that we can do to raise awareness in people's minds and hearts. In these days leading up to the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord, we prepare for Christ's return at the end of time and for Christ's coming in the flesh in the manger at Bethlehem. It is in this order that we see the mystery unfolding in our liturgy.

Take a look at the readings and the collects for Sunday Eucharist. The first two weeks speak of the "end times." It is only after December 17th that the texts begin to prepare us for Christmas.

Impossible as it may seem that we can ever reclaim Advent as a time of holy longing, we are able to reintroduce some of our rich heritage. Might I suggest the following:

- ★ After telling the class that Advent is period of preparation for Christ's return in glory and to honour Christ's coming in the flesh, ask questions like: What can we do to better prepare our minds and hearts for the coming of Christ, at the end of time, at

Christmas and at mass? When has Christ come looking for our assistance? Who has shown us through their words and actions that they are ready to welcome Christ when he comes?

- ★ Finally, avoid speaking about Advent as a penitential season. This has been done far too often in the past, in large part because purple is the colour for both Advent and Lent.
- ★ Ideally, following the ancient practice, the purple that we use at Advent should be a blue-purple: pointing towards Christ's Reign and Kingship. The purple of Lent should be red in hue.

The good news is that Christmas can be observed a lot longer than is our practice.

While many in my family and amongst my friends pack up their tree and put away their crèche on Boxing Day before dashing off to the mall, the Church continues to observe the Christmas season until the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Whether the church observes Christ's birth at Christmas, the apparition of The Magi or The Lord's Baptism, all three feasts recognize an "epiphany" or "manifestation" of God's glory. Maybe you could:

- ★ Talk to your students about how Christmas is celebrated for a few weeks and why before asking: When did you see God's glory over the holiday season?
- ★ Keep your classrooms decorated and tell your students and colleagues why you are doing that. Consider inviting your students to bring in something that can be re-gifted to a local charity. Many community groups enjoy great generosity around Christmas and then suffer without for the other 51 weeks of the year.
- ★ Keep the real trees in the ground and the synthetic ones in boxes. Try an Advent Wreath or a Nativity Scene.

Remember, Jesus has already been born, died and risen for our salvation. It is okay to put the statue of baby Jesus out before Christmas Eve.

Michael Béchard (Rev.)
Chaplain

THE DATING OF CHRISTMAS: THREE THEORIES

While the dating of Easter is clearly connected with the celebration of Passover (14 Nissan in the Jewish Calendar), the establishment for the date of Christmas is not quite so certain and is a source of great debate. There are basically three theories, which need to be considered.

First, there is the belief amongst many scholars that December 25th was chosen as the day for Christmas to supplant the pagan holiday of the "Feast of the Unconquered Sun" (i.e. The Winter Solstice). This seemed to be the leading theory in the second half of the twentieth century. More recent scholarship looking into the

"Their eagerness to be ready should remind us also of our need to be always ready."

writings of the Church Fathers and writings from secular sources point us in other directions.

The second way in which the date may have been established was through a system of calculations that looks at ideas proposed in the infancy narratives, Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth and when Elizabeth's husband would have been ministering in the temple. The biggest problem with this theory is that you need a degree in applied mathematics to figure it out.

The third way in which a date for Christmas may have been assigned is through the dating

of Easter. In the ancient world, it was thought that heroes and heroines often died on the same date that they had been born. It was a way of acknowledging "divine favour." As the theory goes, if Jesus was to have died on March 25 (14 Nissan) – then it only makes sense that he would be born on the same day. The jump here is that Christians recognize life occurring from the moment of conception. Nine months from his conception, brings us to a birth date of December 25.

Regardless of the theory, they all remind us that the early Christians were very concerned with knowing when Jesus was born, in the hopes of knowing when he was to return. Their eagerness to be ready should remind us also of our need to be always ready.

Advent is a time of preparation, when we as a people prepare ourselves for the coming of Our Saviour, Jesus the Christ. Taught by our Saviour's example, we know that prayer is a necessary element of our preparations. We invite you to take some time this Advent Season to join your prayers with the prayer of

Morning Prayer

Come, thou long expected Jesus,
Born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,
Born a child, and yet a king,
Born to reign in us for ever,
Now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By thine all-sufficient merit
Raise us to thy glorious throne.



Evening Prayer

Creator of the stars at night,
Your people's everlasting light,
Jesus, Redeemer, save us all,
And hear your servants when they call.

Now, grieving that the ancient curse
Should doom to death a universe,
You heal all men who need your grace
To save and heal a ruined race.

At whose great name, majestic now,
All knees must bend, all hearts must bow;
All things in heaven and earth adore,
And own thee King for evermore.

To God the Father, God the Son,
And God the Spirit, Three in One,
Praise, honour, might and glory be
From age to age eternally.

SOME IDEAS TO HELP YOU CELEBRATE THE SEASON...

Advent is a time to prepare for Christmas. In our culture we can mistakenly think that means to race to purchase the latest and greatest decorations, and gifts. This can cause stress and anxiety both before and after Christmas. Clearly this is not what the Coming of God is about. There are a number of ways to be counter cultural at this time of the year.

ADVENT CALENDARS

Have students create their own advent calendars that truly focus on preparing for Christ. This can be done in a variety of ways. One simple way is to have students divide a piece of paper into the appropriate number of boxes and write their ideas in each box. As that day is complete they may put a Christmas sticker over each box. An example of such a calendar is available below. This program (and hundreds more) are available online through Youth Ministry Access at www.youthministryaccess.org.

| | Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--------|--|---|--|---|---|--|---|
| Week 1 | Write down the name of one person you will pray for this week. | Collect and drop-off a non-perishable food item at the local food bank. | Lead prayer at your family dinner tonight. Share something you are thankful for so others can do the same. | Look for someone who is left out at school and spend time with them during lunch. | Forgive a friend who hurt you and let them know that you have forgiven them. | Spend time with a younger sibling or neighbour – play a game or read a story to them. | Visit a friend or relative in a nursing home, or write a Christmas letter to a resident in a nearby retirement home. |
| Week 2 | Spend time with a family member instead of playing a video game or watching TV. | With your own money, purchase a gift for a child and donate it to a local gift drive. | Be especially nice to someone who bothers you today. | Look for someone who is in need of help today. Offer your assistance. | Create a card for someone in your parish or community that is home-bound | Spend 10 minutes quietly reflecting on how you need to prepare for Christ's coming and then do it. | Ask a family member how you can be of help to them today. |
| Week 3 | Help make dinner, and create a special atmosphere to share the meal as a family. | Find a gently used piece of clothing and donate it to your local St. Vincent de Paul store. | At the library read about St. Nicholas. Think of two ways you could be like him this Advent. | Read <i>Luke 1:39-45</i> . Reflect on what God has done for you for which you are thankful. | Write a letter to a relative and tell them about your wish for them this new year. | Create a Christmas decoration for your house that will remind you of what Christmas is really about. | Take 10 minutes in a quiet place or on a walk and talk to God about something that is bothering you – ask God for help. |
| Week 4 | Write down the name of one person you will pray for this week. | Write a note to a family member telling them what you appreciate about them. | Share a heart-felt Merry Christmas with two adults you see in passing today. | Ask a family member to share a Christmas memory with you. | Make a list of things for which you are thankful. Take time to say "thank you" in prayer. | | |

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SAINTS FOR JANUARY

January 21 - St. Agnes of Rome (c.291-304) is a popular saint about whom little is known. She is said to have been a beautiful, wealthy Roman girl who dedicated herself to God in childhood. When she was just thirteen years of age she was martyred in Rome for her faith after being betrayed by a man who wanted to marry her but whom she refused. Before her death she forgave him. Today she is often portrayed with a lamb in her arms because the Latin word for lamb is “agnus.”

Dear God, give us the grace to forgive others who wrong us. May we be humble and faithful in our service to you. May we try to act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with you always. Amen.

January 25 - Conversion of St. Paul

Saul was a fierce enemy of Christian believers. One day, while on his way to Damascus to arrest all who belonged to “the Way” of Jesus and bring them back to Damascus, Christ broke into Saul’s life in a dramatic way. Saul was flung to the ground by a bolt of lightning and rendered blind. From this point onward Saul, now ‘Paul’ was transformed from being a persecutor to an ardent follower and preacher who helped to spread the Good News of the Gospel to the whole of the known world. St. Paul never forgot where he came from; he did not hide his checkered past, but used it to lead others to Christ.

I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth takes its name; I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled with the fullness of God.

(Ephesians 3: 15-19)

January 27 - St. Angela Merici (1474-1540) saw poor girls with no education and no hope all around her hometown. In the 15th and 16th centuries, education for women was only available for the rich or for nuns. Angela herself had learned everything on her own because her parents had died when she was ten and she had gone to live with an uncle. She was deeply disturbed when her sister died without receiving the sacraments. A vision reassured her that her sister was safe in God’s care and prompted her to dedicate her life to God. Angela went on to bring together a group of unmarried women who went out into the streets to gather up the girls they saw and teach them. They were so successful that they were asked to bring their innovative approach to education to other cities, and the Order of Ursulines was founded in 1535.

Saint Angela, you were not afraid of change. You did not let stereotypes keep you from serving. Help us to overcome our fear of change in order to follow God’s call and allow others to follow theirs. Amen.

January 28 - St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) is one of the greatest teachers of the medieval Catholic Church and his writings are among the Church’s treasures. The unity, harmony and continuity of faith and reason, of revealed and natural human knowledge, pervade his writings. *The Summa Theologica*, his last and, unfortunately, incomplete work, deals with the whole of Catholic theology.

O God of knowledge, Thomas Aquinas was born with a brilliant mind. He used his gift to create a better world through his writings. I pray that I will use my intelligence to write and speak in a way that gives people hope and builds up your kingdom on earth. Amen.

| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|--|---------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| | | | | | I Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God | 2 St. Basil the Great/ St. Gregory Nazianzen |
| 3 Epiphany of the Lord | 4 St. Elizabeth Seton | 5 Martyrs of Egypt | 6 Blessed André Bressette | 7 St. Raymond of Penyafort | 8 St. Maximus | 9 St. Adrian |
| 10 Baptism of the Lord | 11 St. Alexander | 12 St. Margeurite Bourgeoys | 13 St. Hilary of Poitiers | 14 St. Felix of Nola | 15 St. John Calabytes | 16 St. Liberata |
| 17 World Day of Mi-grants and Refugees | 18 St. Ulfrid | 19 St. Germanicus | 20 St. Fabian St. Sebastian | 21 St. Agnes | 22 St. Vincent | 23 St. Barnard |
| 24 St. Francis de Sales | 25 Conversion of St. Paul | 26 St. Timothy and St. Titus | 27 St. Angela Merici | 28 St. Thomas Aquinas | 29 St. Voloc | 30 St. Hippolytus |
| 31 St. Aidan | | | | | | |

SAINTS FOR FEBRUARY

| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|---|--|----------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| | 1 St. Brigid | 2 Presentation of the Lord | 3 St. Blase St. Ansgar | 4 St. Andrew Corsini | 5 St. Agatha | 6 St. Paul Miki & Compan- ions |
| 7 St. Julian of Bologna | 8 St. Josephine Bakhita | 9 St. Cronan the Wise | 10 St. Scholastica | 11 Our Lady of Lourdes | 12 St. Damian | 13 St. Catherine de Ricci |
| 14 St. Cyril and St. Methodius | 15 St. Faustinus and St. Jovita | 16 St. Onesimus | 17 St. Donatus | 18 St. Simeon | 19 St. Alvarez | 20 Martyrs of Tyre |
| 21 St. Severian | 22 Chair of St. Peter | 23 St. Polycarp | 24 St. Montanus | 25 St. Tarasius | 26 St. Nestor | 27 St. Anne Line |
| 28 St. Hedwig | | | | | | |

February 6 - St. Paul Miki (1564-1597) was the son of a Japanese military leader. He was educated by Jesuits, eventually joining the community where he became known for his eloquent preaching. He and twenty-five of his Catholic companions were crucified for preaching the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Before he died Paul forgave those who had persecuted and were about to kill him.

Dear God, many will challenge us for being who we are and having the beliefs we have. May we stand strong in our faith and connections, holding fast to what we believe to be true and right.

Amen.

February 10 - St. Scholastica, (480-547) was the twin sister of St. Benedict. St. Gregory the Great tells the story of how Benedict would

visit Scholastica once a year and how they would spend the whole day talking about the things of God. One day, Scholastica pressed Benedict to stay a little longer, to talk about the spiritual life. He refused and Scholastica bowed her head and prayed. At once, thunder, lightning, and rain began to storm around the place: it was impossible for Benedict to leave. "What have you done?" Benedict asked his sister. "I asked you and you would not listen; so I asked my God and he did listen," Scholastica replied. St. Gregory observed: "It is not surprising that she was more effective than he: since, as John says, 'God is love,' it was absolutely right that she could do more as she loved more. Three days following her brother's visit St. Scholastica died. St. Benedict died shortly thereafter.

Loving Lord, may my love for my siblings always be strong, so that I can be for them a constant support and a source of love and inspiration. Amen.

February 11 - Our Lady of Lourdes (1858) is the name of the Marian apparition that has appeared to different people around Lourdes. The apparition first appeared in the obscure grotto or cave of Massabielle, near Lourdes in southern France. Our Lady appeared eighteen times to St. Bernadette Soubirous, a young peasant girl. She revealed herself as the Immaculate Conception, asked that a chapel be built on the site of the vision, and told the girl to drink from a fountain in the grotto. No fountain was to be seen, but when Bernadette dug at a spot designated by the apparition, a spring began to flow. The water from this still flowing spring has shown remarkable healing power, though it contains no curative property that science can identify. St. Bernadette died in 1879 and her feast day is celebrated on April 16. The Lady of Lourdes kept the promise she made to Bernadette, "I do not promise to make you happy in this life, but in the next."

Hail Mary, full of grace the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.



CHRISTMAS GIFT GIVING...

To counterbalance our culture's focus on consumerism, encourage students to create home made gifts or give gift certificates for dusting the house, making a meal, babysitting for an evening or a foot massage. There are many websites available that have a host of homemade gift ideas.

The following program for youth can be found at <http://www.insight.typepad.co.uk/insight/2007/12/giving-to-other.html>.

Giving to others at Christmas

We all like to think about what we might receive at Christmas, but Christmas is also a time of giving. We look forward to what people will give us, but our giving to others can make a big difference to their Christmas and their understanding about the birth of Jesus.

Give a Gift

Bring in some colour magazines or catalogues which contain lots of ideas for gift items. Divide your group into teams of 4 or 5 and give each a magazine, a large piece of paper, scissors, paste and pen. Tell them they need to make a collage of gifts they

would send to the following people: Dad, Mother, a baby, prime minister, your best friend, your wonderful chaplain, yourself.

“Visit a local hospital children’s ward, give to a Christmas appeal, visit a homeless shelter, make Christmas cards for folks who will feel and be alone this Christmas.”

For older groups you can also add the extra factor of working to a budget (\$1000).

What factors do we consider when

choosing a present for a person? Discuss. Answers might include; the person you are giving it to, your own preference, how much you think of them, what price you are willing to pay.

Who did you give your most expensive present to? Why? What did you give a baby? What did you give the [prime minister]? How much did you spend on yourself? What do these answers show about what you think of the person you are giving the gift to?

What ways can we give to others at Christmas to help them enjoy the celebration or help them discover the true meaning of Christmas? What ideas can you think of? Giving presents, sending Christmas cards, donations to a Christmas appeal for people in need, carol singing etc.

Reflection

How could we as a group put this into practice? Encourage discussion and creative ideas. What could students do in the wider community? Plan and follow this through with them if you can. It will change their perspective on Christmas! Visit a local hospital children’s ward, give to a Christmas appeal, visit a homeless shelter, make Christmas cards for folks who will feel and be alone this Christmas. The simple activity of making cards and delivering them can make a big difference to those who receive them and the group as they think of others at Christmas.



SONG SUGGESTIONS FOR ADVENT & EPIPHANY

CBW = Catholic Book of Worship III (1994) / G = Gather, 2nd Edition (1994) /

GP = Glory & Praise (1984)

The season of Advent is characterized by a spirit of joy and anticipation. The readings invite the Church to look forward to the second coming of Christ at the end of time. The music of Advent, like the readings, evokes a variety of images and feelings: judgment, longing, repentance, hopefulness, and expectant joy. Here are some suggestions for preparing the music of Advent.

HYMNS FOR ADVENT

| | |
|---|---|
| Advent Gathering – G250 | My Soul in Stillness Waits – G252 |
| The Advent of Our God – CBW315 | Now in This Banquet (Advent refrain) – CBW608, G600 |
| Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn – CBW303 | O Come, Divine Messiah – CBW310 |
| Be Light for Our Eyes – CBW305, G354 | O Come, O Come Emmanuel – CBW312 |
| Bread of Life (with Advent verses) – CBW597A | Patience, People – GP131 |
| Come, O Long Expected Jesus – CBW306 | Prepare the Way of the Lord – CBW317 |
| Every Valley – CBW308, GP14 | Save Us, O Lord – GP234 |
| God of All People – CBW314, G255 | Sing a New Song – CBW563, G384, GP47 |
| The King Shall Come – CBW318, G248 | Wait for the Lord – CBW 319, G256 |
| Like a shepherd – CBW490, G251, GP35 | Within Our Hearts Be Born – G253 |
| Listen, My People – CBW309 | |

RESPONSORIAL PSALMS FOR ADVENT

| | |
|---|--|
| 25 (To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.) – CBW16, G34 | 146 (Lord, come and save us) – CBW23, G124 |
| 85 (Lord, let us see your kindness.) – CBW15, G73 | |

As the rest of the world seems to be ending their observance of the Christmas Season on December 25, the Church is just beginning her celebration of nearly three weeks. Perhaps you might consider having an Epiphany liturgy after the Christmas holidays as an opportunity for your school community to continue celebrating the Christmas season. The readings for the Solemnity of the Epiphany point toward the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles and to the whole world. Below you will find music suggestions that relate directly to these themes.

HYMNS FOR EPIPHANY

| | |
|--|---|
| All the Ends of the Earth – G378, GP174 | O Star of Christ's Appearing – CBW347 |
| Arise, Shine Forth, Your Light Has Come – CBW342 | Of the Father's Love Begotten – CBW330 |
| As with Gladness Men of Old – CBW343 | One Bread, One Body – G599, GP127 |
| A Child is Born – GP255 | Songs of Thankfulness and Praise – CBW348 |
| City of God – CBW345, G485, GP187 | Twas in the Moon of Wintertime – CBW337 |
| The First Nowell – CBW344, GP406 | What Child is This – CBW338, GP412 |
| In the Darkness Shines the Splendor – CBW346 | What Star is This – CBW349 |
| Lord, Today – G279, GP118 | |

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 72 - SETTINGS FOR EPIPHANY

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Lord, every nation on earth – CBW37 | Every nation on earth – G67 |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|

The Office of Campus Ministry
266 Epworth Avenue
London, ON N6A 2M3
1-800-265-4406 / 519-433-3491
campusministry@uwo.ca

Team Members:

Michael Béchard (Rev.)
Susan Glaab, CSJ
Annette Donovan Panchaud
Janet Loo
Andrea Rector

WE'RE ON THE WEB:

**[WWW.KINGS.UWO.CA/
CAMPUS_MINISTRY](http://WWW.KINGS.UWO.CA/CAMPUS_MINISTRY)**

"The liturgy of Advent...helps us to understand fully the value and meaning of the mystery of Christmas. It is not just about commemorating the historical event, which occurred some 2,000 years ago in a little village of Judea. Instead, it is necessary to understand that the whole of our life must be an 'advent,' a vigilant awaiting of the final coming of Christ. To predispose our mind to welcome the Lord who, as we say in the Creed, one day will come to judge the living and the dead, we must learn to recognize him as present in the events of daily life. Therefore, Advent is, so to speak, an intense training that directs us decisively toward him who already came, who will come, and who comes continuously."

Excerpt from Pope John Paul II's general audience on Wednesday December 18, 2002.

Advent Prayer

Lord Jesus,
Master of both the light and the darkness,
send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas.

We who have so much to do
seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day.

We who are anxious over many things
look forward to your coming among us.

We who are blessed in so many ways
long for the complete joy of your kingdom.

We whose hearts are heavy
seek the joy of your presence.

We are your people,
walking in darkness,
yet seeking the light.

To you we say, "Come Lord Jesus!"

- Henri J. M. Nouwen

