

LITURGY & LIFE
THE EMMAUS JOURNEY

The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

Cycle B

A Catholic Update Companion to the Sunday Readings

THE WORD BECAME FLESH—GOD DWELLS AMONG US

Receive the Light • Adore the Word made flesh • Recognize Christ among us • Carry His presence into the world

1: FOR THE HOMILIST/PCL OR OCIA CO-ORD.: CHRIST SPEAKS - WE LISTEN

Sunday Readings

Liturgical Color	White — Christmas
First Reading	Isaiah 52:7–10
Responsorial Psalm	Psalm 98:1, 2–3, 3–4, 5–6
Second Reading	Hebrews 1:1–6
Gospel	John 1:1–18

The Heart of This Sunday's Gospel

THE WORD BECAME FLESH

Christmas announces more than the birth of a remarkable child. The eternal Word through whom all things were made entered human history and made His dwelling among us. John does not begin with shepherds, angels, or a manger. He draws us into the mystery behind Bethlehem: Jesus Christ is the Word who was with God and is God. In Him, the invisible God becomes visible, divine life enters human weakness, and light shines in a darkness that cannot overcome it. The Son of God does not save us from a distance. He assumes our humanity, shares our vulnerability, and comes close enough to be received—or refused. Christmas therefore asks more than admiration. It asks faith. To celebrate the Nativity is to welcome the Word, allow His light to uncover what is hidden, and become a dwelling place through which His grace and truth enter the world.

The Liturgical Thread

Isaiah announces good news to a people longing for restoration: God reigns, comforts His people, and reveals salvation before all nations. Psalm 98 summons the whole earth to sing because the Lord has made His saving power known. Hebrews proclaims that the God who spoke through the prophets has now spoken definitively through the Son, the radiant image of divine glory. John carries the proclamation to its deepest mystery: the eternal Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The readings move from promise to proclamation, from divine speech to divine presence. The God who once spoke through messengers now comes personally. The disciple is invited to behold His glory, receive His life, and bear witness to the Light.

THE MOVEMENT OF THE READINGS

God announces peace → The nations behold salvation → God speaks through the Son → The Word becomes flesh → Those who receive Him become children of God → The disciple carries Christ's light into the world

Listening With the Heart

Listen

Read John 1:1–18 slowly. Listen for the repeated words: Word, life, light, witness, receive, glory, grace, and truth. Notice what the passage reveals about who Jesus is before it tells us what He does.

Reflect

Where do you most need Christ's light today? What part of the mystery of the Incarnation—God becoming truly human—awakens wonder, gratitude, resistance, or hope within you?

Pray

Speak to Jesus as Emmanuel, God-with-us. Thank Him for entering human weakness. Ask for the grace to receive Him not only as an idea or tradition, but as the living Lord who desires to dwell within you.

Rest

Rest with the words: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” Allow the mystery to become personal: God has come near. You are not abandoned. His light is present even where darkness remains.

Carry This Word

JOHN 1:14

“And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”

2: FOR THE CATECHIST: THE CHURCH TEACHES - WE LEARN

Catechetical Focus

THE INCARNATION: GOD COMES NEAR TO SAVE

The Incarnation is the mystery at the heart of Christmas: the eternal Son of God assumed a true human nature without ceasing to be divine. Jesus Christ is one divine Person with two natures, fully God and fully human. He did not merely appear human, nor did God temporarily inhabit an ordinary man. The Word truly became flesh. By entering our condition, Christ reveals the Father, restores the dignity of human nature, shares our suffering, and opens the way for us to become children of God by grace. Christmas therefore reveals both who God is and what humanity is called to become. God is self-giving love who draws near; the human person is created to receive divine life and reflect Christ's light in the world.

Catholic Update Resources

PRIMARY CATHOLIC UPDATE

C0101A | Jesus Christ: Why the Word Became Flesh

This Update provides the doctrinal center of the Christmas chapter by exploring why the eternal Son of God entered human history. The Word became flesh to reveal the Father, reconcile humanity to God, show us the depth of divine love, heal and elevate human nature, and make us sharers in the divine life. Read alongside John's Prologue, it helps participants move beyond a sentimental understanding of Christmas toward the saving mystery of the Incarnation. The child of Bethlehem is the eternal Son, and His nearness calls for faith, worship, conversion, and a new way of seeing every human life.

SECONDARY CATHOLIC UPDATE

C1812A | The Origin of Christmas Traditions: A Window to Our Faith

This Update helps participants interpret familiar Christmas customs as signs that can lead beyond themselves to the mystery of Christ. Lights can proclaim the Light shining in darkness; gifts can recall the Father's gift of the Son; evergreens can point toward enduring life; the crèche can draw the household into contemplation of the Incarnation. The resource also helps catechumens and candidates distinguish Christian celebration from commercial pressure or nostalgia. Traditions become fruitful when they open a path to worship, hospitality, generosity, family prayer, and care for those who might otherwise experience Christmas as a season of loneliness or exclusion.

The Catechist's Companion

Key Teaching

In Jesus Christ, the eternal Word truly became human without ceasing to be God. Those who receive Him are given new life and are sent to make His grace, truth, and light visible.

Session Aim

Help participants understand the Incarnation as the saving mystery of the eternal Son becoming truly human, recognize how Christmas symbols can serve faith, and identify one concrete way to receive and reveal Christ's presence during the Christmas season.

Formation Objectives

- Explain what the Church means by the Incarnation.
- Identify Jesus Christ as fully God and fully human.
- Describe why the Word became flesh and how the Incarnation reveals human dignity.
- Interpret common Christmas traditions through the lens of faith.
- Choose one concrete practice of worship, hospitality, or mercy that bears Christ's light to another person.

Integrating This Week's Catholic Updates

C0101A establishes the doctrinal foundation: Christmas celebrates the eternal Word becoming flesh for our salvation. C1812A translates that mystery into the language of Christian culture and household practice, showing how lights, gifts, the crèche, music, meals, and hospitality can either obscure Christ or become windows opening onto Him. Together with the readings, the Updates form one movement: God speaks through the Son, the Word enters human life, believers receive Him in faith, and ordinary customs become occasions to adore Christ and reveal His presence.

Expand the Conversation

- Why does John begin the Christmas Gospel before creation rather than at Bethlehem?
- What difference does it make that Jesus is fully God and fully human?
- How can a family tradition become an act of faith rather than mere nostalgia?
- Who is most likely to feel unseen or alone during Christmas, and how can the Church embody Emmanuel for that person?

Common Misunderstandings

- Christmas is not simply the birthday of a great religious teacher. It celebrates the eternal Son of God entering human history.
- The Incarnation does not mean that Jesus is partly divine and partly human. He is fully divine and fully human.
- Christian tradition is not opposed to doctrine. Healthy customs make the Church's faith visible, memorable, and livable.
- Receiving Christ is more than feeling festive. It includes faith, worship, conversion, sacramental life, and love of neighbor.
- Christmas joy does not erase grief, poverty, family conflict, or loneliness. Emmanuel enters these realities and calls the Church to compassionate presence.

Church References

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 456–483; 525–526; 460; 479–483; 1691–1698; 2466. Scripture connections: Genesis 1:1–5; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 9:1–6; Micah 5:1–4; Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 2:1–20; John 3:16–21; Philippians 2:5–11; Colossians 1:15–20; 1 John 1:1–4.

OCIA Connection

For catechumens and candidates, Christmas provides a decisive answer to the question, “Who is Jesus Christ?” He is not merely a moral guide or spiritual example, but the eternal Son who has come in the flesh to reveal the Father and give divine life. Catechumens are preparing to be united with Christ through the Sacraments of Initiation. Baptized candidates are deepening communion with the One whose life they already share through Baptism. Sponsors should help participants connect the public beauty of Christmas liturgy with the personal call to receive Christ, belong to His Body, and live as children of God.

Catechist’s Insight

PASTORAL CARE

Christmas can intensify grief, family tension, financial strain, loneliness, infertility, addiction, or memories of loss. Do not assume every participant experiences the season as uncomplicated joy. Avoid pressuring people to disclose painful circumstances or to imitate an idealized family celebration. Make room for lament as well as gratitude. Offer concrete parish connections, transportation, invitations, meals, and pastoral support. Remind participants that the Incarnation proclaims God’s presence precisely within human vulnerability, not only within perfect circumstances.

Begin with wonder before explanation. John’s Prologue contains profound doctrine, but its purpose is not abstraction; it announces that God has come near. Use concrete images—light, dwelling, birth, gift, family, table, welcome—to help participants enter the mystery. Then clarify essential teaching: the one born of Mary is the eternal Son, fully divine and fully human. Invite questions without embarrassment. For some participants, Christmas customs may carry cultural or family meanings distinct from Catholic practice; honor what is good while gently showing how Christian symbols point toward Christ.

3: FOR THE CANDIDATE/CATECHUMEN: THE DISCIPLE RESPONDS - WE LIVE

Living the Gospel This Week

- Where have I reduced Christmas to activity, nostalgia, or obligation?
- What darkness in my life needs the light of Christ?
- Do I receive Jesus as Lord, or only admire Him from a safe distance?
- How does the Incarnation change the way I view my own body and the dignity of others?
- Who near me may be lonely, grieving, excluded, or overwhelmed during Christmas?
- Which Christmas tradition can I reclaim as a genuine act of faith?

Choosing to Be an Intentional Disciple

WHAT IS CHRIST ASKING OF ME TODAY?

Where can I make room for Christ by making room for another person?

The Word made flesh entered a world that had little room for Him. Intentional discipleship makes room: in the schedule for prayer, at the table for a guest, in the budget for generosity, in conversation for someone who is grieving, and in the heart for reconciliation. Choose one person who may otherwise be overlooked and offer a concrete sign that God has not forgotten them.

Holy Habit

THE DAILY INCARNATION PRAYER

Each morning during the Christmas season, slowly pray: “The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.” Name one place you need Christ to dwell today—your home, work, body, memory, relationship, fear, or decision. Ask: “Lord Jesus, how can Your grace and truth take flesh in my choices today?” In the evening, thank Him for one moment when His light became visible.

Faith Into Practice

- Place the Bible and crèche in a visible prayer space and read John 1:1–18 together.
- Attend Christmas Mass with enough time for quiet prayer before or afterward.
- Invite or accompany someone who would otherwise be alone.
- Give a gift or meal anonymously to a household under strain.
- Contact a grieving person without trying to fix their sorrow.
- Choose one Christmas custom and explain its Christian meaning to a child, guest, or family member.
- Spend one day of the Christmas season limiting shopping and media so that prayer and presence receive more room.

Personal Reflection

What would change if I truly believed that God has entered human life and desires to dwell in the ordinary circumstances of my own life? Where is Christ asking me to become a visible sign of His nearness?

4: FOR THE SPONSOR: THE CHURCH SENDS - WE WITNESS

Sponsor's Path of Accompaniment

Share Your Faith	Share a Christmas memory in which Christ became more real to you—not necessarily through a perfect celebration, but through prayer, mercy, grief, reconciliation, welcome, or unexpected generosity. Explain how the experience changed the way you understand Emmanuel, God-with-us.
Walk Together	Read John 1:1–18 together and underline the words “life,” “light,” “receive,” “grace,” and “truth.” Ask: “Which word best describes what you are seeking from Christ?” Listen carefully and connect the response with the participant’s OCIA journey.
Pray Together	Visit the church’s Nativity scene or pray before a household crèche. Read John 1:14 aloud. Allow two minutes of silence, then each person names one place where Christ’s light is needed. Conclude with the Glory Be.
Experience the Church	Attend one Christmas liturgy or parish Christmas gathering together. Arrive early enough to notice the crèche, candles, music, vestments, proclamation of the Word, and welcome of visitors. Afterward, discuss what each sign revealed about the Incarnation.
Continue the Journey	Complete a concrete “Emmanuel visit” together: bring a meal to someone who is homebound, visit a nursing facility, invite an isolated person to coffee or dinner, deliver parish gifts to a family in need, or assist at a Christmas outreach. Do not merely discuss hospitality—practice it together, then reflect on where you encountered Christ.

Faith at Home

Gather near the crèche or a candle. Read John 1:1–5, 14. Invite each person to name one sign of God’s light they received during the past year and one person who needs that light now. Place the person’s name near the crèche and choose a household action of welcome, generosity, or reconciliation. Conclude: “Jesus, Word made flesh, dwell in our home and make us signs of Your light.”

Parish Life

Help the parish receive Christmas visitors as people rather than attendance numbers. Sponsors and OCIA team members can serve as intentional hosts: greet newcomers, sit with those attending alone, explain unfamiliar parts of the liturgy when appropriate, introduce participants to parishioners, and invite them to return during the Christmas season. Coordinate one concrete outreach to people who are homebound, grieving, unhoused, newly arrived, or separated from family.

Go Forth This Week

Receive the Word made flesh, make room for one person, and let Christ's light become visible through you.

Prayer for the Week

Eternal Father, in the fullness of time You sent Your Son, the Word through whom all things were made. He did not remain distant from our weakness, but took flesh, entered our history, and made His dwelling among us. Open my eyes to behold His glory and my heart to receive His grace and truth. Let the light of Christ shine into every place ruled by fear, sin, grief, or loneliness. Teach me to honor the dignity of every human life, for the Son of God has shared our humanity. Make my home a place of welcome, my words a source of peace, my gifts an expression of love, and my choices a witness to Emmanuel. Through the Holy Spirit, form Christ within me so that others may encounter His presence through my patience, generosity, reverence, and joy. Jesus, Word made flesh, dwell in me and send me forth to carry Your light into the world. Amen.

Emmaus Insight

Emmaus begins with the same mystery Christmas proclaims: the risen Christ draws near, enters the ordinary journey, opens the Word, and becomes known in shared life.