

Sunday and Feast Day Liturgical Notes for Priests and Deacons

Suggestions for Leading Worship



Office of Worship
P.O. Box 2028
Baton Rouge, LA 70821-2028
Phone: (225) 242-0120
Fax: (225) 336-8731
E-Mail: tranzino@diobr.org

RE: Liturgical Suggestions for the Solemnity of Christmas 2007 – Cycle A

Feast Day date: December 24-25, 2007

Dear Fathers and Deacons,

An Overview...

The Solemnity of the Nativity is one which has grown in importance in the contemporary world, in part by the dubious connection with commercialism. What is celebrated in culture is often the money spent, the “wants” being confused with the “needs” and the discomfort of being with family and friends who may rarely spend time together the remainder of the year. Holding some aspect of a *faithful* celebration is an intentional act, which often begins with attending Christmas Mass. Within the Church’s tradition, the paschal mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection are the primary events of redemption, with the paschal Triduum as the primary focal point of the liturgical year. However, culturally, Christmas is the focal point. While Easter has been celebrated since earliest times of the Church, the celebration of the Nativity originated in the fourth century in Rome.

The “Day of the Revival of the Unconquered Sun” was a pagan feast in the winter cycle. This feast was “christianized” to run counter to the prevailing pagan cultural festivities.

What is central to our feast of Christmas is not the birthday of Jesus or the fact that He has come to earth; what is central is our awareness that this same Jesus guides us still, that the inauguration of the reign of God came in Jesus and that the kingdom is not yet completely here. Jesus is our

mediator forever. The same Child Savior of Bethlehem goes to the cross. John's baptism of Jesus in the Jordan was for His public ministry, which is ultimately why He came to us.

The "season" of Christmas-Epiphany begins with the first Vespers of Christmas and ends with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, usually on the Sunday after the Epiphany. Within the Christmas octave there is also on the Sunday after Christmas the Feast of the Holy Family. There is as well the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, celebrated on January 1. The Epiphany is the Sunday between January 1 and January 8.

There are four sets of liturgical texts in the *Missal* for the Christmas liturgies, and each mark a time of day: evening vigil; midnight, dawn and day. These present to the assembly different ways of talking about Christmas. There are also four sets of readings in the *Lectionary* for Christmas. The Vigil readings must be used for the Vigil. Pastoral accommodations can be made to use just one set of readings for all three Christmas day readings. However, presiders and preachers are urged to use the various Mass Propers and *Lectionary* texts for each particular time the parish gathers for the celebration. Each celebration will have its own particular character. Unifying elements can be a common penitential rite, preface, Eucharistic Prayer, and Solemn Blessing.

Some Faith Sharing Questions...

1. What image from the Christmas *Lectionary* texts speak most to you? How can this image guide your living?
2. What does it mean to say that Christmas celebrates the "entire Christ Jesus", the "adult Christ" and not only the infant in the crib???

Some Considerations As You Prepare...

Christmas Vigil: This is intended to be a true Vigil, celebrated over the night before the Solemnity itself. The prayers of this Mass still speak of waiting and keeping watch. They ask that Christmas morning will find us at peace...

Penitential Rite: *Sacramentary* C-iii set of invocations is best.

Opening Prayer: The Alternative Prayer is the more recommended.

The Gloria is sung again at last!

Creed: The assembly is asked to genuflect at the words "and became man" during the Profession of Faith at all Christmas Masses. An announcement just prior to the opening words of the Creed and strong modeling by all the ministers will help set this into the custom of the assembly's prayer practice.

Prefaces: Christmas I, II or III are all worthy.

Eucharistic Prayer I with its special seasonal insert is recommended for Christmas; or Eucharistic Prayer III with its global thrust.

The Solemn Blessing “For Christmas” is of course appropriate.

Christmas Midnight: The readings of the Midnight Mass are perhaps the most well known...

The *Proclamation of the Birth of Christ* may be sung or proclaimed after the Greeting and introduction to the Midnight Mass. The Gloria and Opening Prayer immediately follows, so that if the Proclamation of the Birth of Christ is done there is no Penitential Rite. Some parishes choose to do this Proclamation at all the Masses of Christmas Day.

The “light” theme is dominant throughout this liturgy.

Opening Prayer: the First Opening Prayer is recommended.

Preface: Christmas I is the more recommended, to reflect the “light” theme.

Remaining Propers suggestions same as above.

Christmas Dawn: There are two dominant themes for this liturgy: the ability to wonder at God’s nearness to us and the challenge to grow in the life of Christ.

Keep these in mind as you make choices:

Opening Prayer: Use the Alternative as it refers to a time of day and reflects the first reading text.

Preface: Use Christmas III or I.

Remaining Propers suggestions same as above.

Christmas Day: The emphasis on the Lectionary text and Mass Propers is the “Word made flesh.....”

Opening Prayer: Use the Alternative Opening Prayer as it better reflects the Gospel text from John. Stress the words *bright dawn Word made flesh.*

The Prayer Over the Gifts uses the word *peace* twice. This emphasis could be incorporated into the introduction to the Lord's Prayer and to Communion.

Remaining Propers suggestions same as above.

Looking Ahead...

1. The Feast of the Holy Family is December 30. There is an Order of Blessings for Families found in the *Book of Blessings*, Chapter 1. You might include this in your parish *Bulletin* to encourage families to use at home.
2. Make sure your community is aware of the New Year's schedule.
3. The Christmas season will not end until the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Leave the decorations up until then.
4. Lent comes early February!—hardly enough time to put up Christmas.

Sample Intercessory Prayers for the Solemnity of Christmas

Priest: We hold these prayers before the Father's generosity in sending us His only begotten Son:

Deacon (or if there is no deacon, another reader):

1. For all in the Church; for Benedict our Pope and Robert our Bishop; may the community of the baptized find renewed strength to discipleship in Christ born for us all, we pray to the Lord...
2. For this world and all of God's people; for peace in the hearts of all with good will and the reassurance of hope through God's Spirit, we pray to the Lord...
3. For the poor who have no power; for the hungry, the homeless; for those with no family; for the hidden poor who are forgotten; may God comfort their spirits, we pray to the Lord...
4. For our parish; may this time of Christmas joy unite us in peace and in our common life through our worship and service, we pray to the Lord...
5. For all who have died this year; may God's consolation carry all sorrow and bring peace to those who mourn, we pray to the Lord...
6. In silence, we offer our prayers to the Lord...

[pause, the presider alone concludes...]

Priest: O God, we keep this Feast recalling the birth of your Son.
May this gift of your Son's life find room in our hearts
that we may rejoice in your generosity and kindness.
We ask this through the same Christ Jesus,
the Savior of all the world,
forever and ever.
Amen.