

*Family Vespers
for the
Twelve Days of Christmas*



Family Vespers during the Twelve Days of Christmas

Typically, Christmas is known as a time for the family. Visits are made to the homes of relatives, children have a break from classes, and many parents have a leave from work. It would seem to be an ideal situation for the increasing of quality time together and the strengthening of familial bonds.

But this will not happen automatically; we must prioritize this thought and make it a goal. Just as we set aside a particular time for the opening of gifts or sharing an elaborate meal, we must set time aside and prepare for family reflection on the eternal truths that the Christmas Season proclaims to us. The Christmas Vespers provide such opportunities for us daily during the Season.

Rather than dry lectures and preformed prayers, the Christmas Vespers can be a time of family involvement and learning together. It is suggested that the Vesper be celebrated gathered around the Christmas Tree. Originally conceived as a symbol of the Tree of Life, by now the presents underneath it will have been opened and put away, making it a great place to reflect on the themes of the season - light, joy, provision, and eternal life. For many families the most convenient time will be around 6: 00 pm, but this is not a strict rule. However, Vespers should be celebrated at a set time for each of the Twelve Days, and that time followed consistently. If the family travels during the Season, the Vespers can be done away from home. All you need to bring are your Bibles and this guide!

As much as possible, the secular should be kept out of Vesper time. Songs sung should be Christmas Carols, not pop standards, and the focus should be on God's most precious gift rather than the material paradigm so prevalent today.

Each of the twelve Days has its own theme and Scriptures, taken from the Daily Office Lectionary in the Book of Common Prayer. It is suggested that each family member be allowed a turn in leading and planning for a daily Vesper. Each day might spark a creative idea about meeting a local need or exploring an ignored tenet of the faith. Encourage that creativity and exploration, and have a Blessed Christmas - for all Twelve Days of it!

Scriptures and Themes for Each Day of Christmas

Dec. 25, the 1st Day of Christmas

Psalm 110, 132 / Micah 4: 1-5; 5: 2-4 / 1 John 4: 7-16 / John 3: 31-36

Theme: "Jesus, Love from God"

Dec. 26, the 2nd Day of Christmas/ Feast of St. Stephen

Psalm 118 / Acts 6: 1-7 / Acts 7: 59-8: 8 / Matthew 23: 34-39

Theme: "The Clergy"

Dec. 27, the 3rd Day of Christmas / Feast of St. John

Psalm 145 / Isaiah 44: 1-8 / 1 John 5: 1-12 / John 13: 20-35

Theme: "The Apostles"

Dec. 28, the 4th Day of Christmas / Feast of the Holy Innocents

Psalm 19, 126 / Isaiah 54: 1-13 / Acts 12: 11-17 / Mark 10: 13-16

Theme: "Jesus Loves the Little Children"

Dec. 29, the 5th Day of Christmas

Psalm 18: 20-50 / 2 Samuel 23: 13-17b / 2 John 1-13 / John 2: 1-11

Theme: "Jesus Helps Those in Trouble"

Dec. 30, the 6th Day of Christmas

Psalm 23, 27 / 1 Kings 17: 17-24 / 3 John 1-14 / John 4: 46-54

Theme: "Jesus Heals the Sick"

Dec. 31, the 7th Day of Christmas

Psalm 90 / Isaiah 65: 15b-25 / Revelation 21: 1-6 / John 5: 1-15

Theme: "Jesus Makes Things New"

Jan. 1, the 8th Day of Christmas / Feast of the Holy Name

Psalm 148 / Isaiah 62: 1-5; 10-12 / Revelation 19: 11-16 / Matt. 1: 18-25

Theme: "Jesus' Name is Special"

Jan. 2, the 9th Day of Christmas

Psalm 33 / 1 Kings 19: 1-8 / Ephesians 4: 1-16 / John 6: 1-14

Theme: "Jesus Feeds His Children"

Jan. 3, the 10th Day of Christmas

Psalm 72 / 1 Kings 19: 9-18 / Ephesians 4: 17-32 / John 6: 15-27

Theme: "Jesus Never Leaves Us Alone"

Jan. 4, the 11th Day of Christmas

Psalm 89: 1-29 / Joshua 3: 14-4: 7 / Ephesians 5: 1-20 / John 9: 1-12; 35-38

Theme: "Jesus, Our Mighty God"

Jan. 5, the 12th Day of Christmas

Psalm 29; 98 / Isaiah 66: 18-23 / Romans 15: 7-13 / John 11: 17-27; 33-44

Theme: "Jesus Shows the World His Glory"

The Vesper begins with a favorite Carol. Then the father, head of the household, or other family member appointed says:

The Acclamation

Father: Blessed be the Lord God, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us.

All: *Our souls exalt Him, and our spirits rejoice in Him our Savior.*

On the Saturdays of Christmas the following confession and absolution is included. It is optional on the other days.

Summary of the Law

Father: Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ says: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

The Act of Penitence

Father: Christmas proclaims that there is born for us a Savior! Let us pray to Him Who forgives our sins.

Time of silence for examination of conscience, then all say together the following confession:

All: *Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we have sinned against You through our own fault. We have wavered in our love for You; we have put our own interests above that of all others; and we have not lived out the full reality of Christ in us. Forgive us and cleanse us, O faithful and righteous God, that we may continually walk in the light of Your fellowship. Amen.*

Absolution

Father: The Almighty and Merciful Lord, for the sake of the Blood of the Cross of His Son Jesus Christ, has laid not our sins to our charge, but has forgiven us all that is past.

He has granted us the grace to put away the evil and to cling to the good, so that we may walk with perfect hearts before Him all our days. **Amen.**

If there is no confession, the Vigil resumes here.

Opening Prayer

Father: The Lord be with you.

All: ***And with your spirit.***

Father: Let us pray.

O Lord our God, You wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, Your Nature within man. Grant that we value and treasure this most precious gift, as we guard and defend it from every distortion or dilution. We praise you this evening through Jesus Christ our Savior: God with us, God for us, God in us. **Amen.**

Reading of the Scriptures

The appointed Old Testament Scripture is read now, followed by the appointed Psalm. (Refer to p. 3) Another Carol may then be sung, then the New Testament reading and the Gospel for the Day is read. Anyone in the household may read these passages.

Reflection

A reflection, based on the scriptures and theme of the day, is given by one of the family members, encouraging the family to ministry and works of service. At the end of the reflection another Carol is sung.

Prayers

Prayers are now offered up by all members of the family, based on the daily theme. (Refer to p. 3) For example, on Day two prayers are offered for the clergy, on Day six the sick are prayed for, and so forth. After the conclusion of these prayers comes the following:

The Lord's Prayer

Father: Let us pray.

The Lord's Prayer may be sung or said

All: *Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil.

For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory; forever and ever. Amen. ☩

Concluding Proclamation

Father: Jesus is the Light of all the nations,
He is the bright and Morning Star;
the Dawn from on High breaks upon us;
Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

All: *We praise and bless You, our Lord and our God,
To save and redeem us, You gave us Your Son.*

*And so through Him, our King and Savior, in the
unity of the Holy Spirit, we bless You, God our
Father.*

*To You be all honor, praise, and glory; while eternal
ages run. Amen.*

Benediction

Father: The Word made flesh, Who came to live with us, bless you with His salvation.

All: Amen.

Father: The Son of God, Who came to show us Heaven on earth, bless you with His truth.

All: Amen.

Father: The Rock of our Salvation, Who came to strengthen us in our weakness, bless you with His grace:

All: Amen.

Father: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen. ☩

A final Carol may be sung, then ideally, a meal is shared together.



