



Series of bite sized liturgical points on *The Liturgical Year*.

litbits

NO 3 | 17

Jocelyn Versace, Liturgy Field Officer E:liturgy.cfl@perthcatholic.org.au
Centre for Liturgy, Archdiocese of Perth.

Christmas Time

IV. Christmas Time

After the annual celebration of the Paschal Mystery, the Church has no more ancient custom than celebrating the memorial of the Nativity of the Lord and of his first manifestations, and this takes place in Christmas Time.

Christmas Time runs from First Vespers (Evening Prayer I) of the Nativity of the Lord up to and including the Sunday after Epiphany or after 6 January.

The Vigil Mass of the Nativity is used on the evening of 24 December, either before or after First Vespers (Evening Prayer I).

On the day of the Nativity of the Lord, following ancient Roman tradition, Mass may be celebrated three times, that is, in the night, at dawn and during the day.

The General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar Excerpts from the English translation of The Roman Missal © 2010, International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

Order of Blessing a Christmas Manger or Nativity Scene

1541 In its present form the custom of displaying figures depicting the birth of Jesus Christ owes its origin to Saint Francis of Assisi who made the Christmas crib or manger for Christmas eve of 1223. However, as early as the fourth century representations of the nativity of the Lord were painted as wall decorations depicting not only the infancy narrative accounts of Christ's birth, but also the words of the prophets Isaiah and Habakkuk taken to mean that the Messiah would be born in the midst of animals in a manger.

1542 The blessing of the Christmas manger or nativity scene, according to pastoral circumstances, may take place on the Vigil of Christmas or at another more suitable time.

1543 The blessing may be given during a celebration of the word of God, during Mass, or even during another service, e.g., a carol service.

1544 If the manger is set up in the church, it must not be placed in the presbyterium. A place should be chosen that is suitable for prayer and devotion and is easily accessible by the faithful.

Order of Blessing a Christmas Tree

1570 The use of the Christmas tree is relatively modern. Its origins are found in the medieval mystery plays which depicted the tree of paradise and the Christmas light or candle which symbolized Christ, the Light of the world.

1571 According to custom, the Christmas tree is set up just before Christmas and may remain in place until the solemnity of Epiphany. Although the primary place for the Christmas tree is the home, at times one or more may also be placed in the church. In such a case, the decoration of the trees should be appropriate to their use in the church, and care should be taken that they do not interfere with the requirements of the liturgical space.

© The English translation of Book of Blessings 1987
International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc. (ICEL).
All rights reserved. Used with permission.

