

# The Western Churchman

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## PUBLISHERS' NOTICE.

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## PREPARATION FOR CHRISTMAS

In this great western land where there are so many Englishmen, it is only natural to expect that such a festival as Christmas should be almost universally observed. During the first week of the old year and the first week of the new, festive gatherings, in the city, as well as in the country district, follow one another in rapid succession, and greetings suitable to the season are exchanged on all hands. So far as outward appearances go, everyone seems to be keeping the festival; but, what does the observance amount to? Do we for one moment believe that the great doctrine of the Incarnation is so universally appreciated, that men feel compelled to give outward expression to their gratitude

for the blessings which it has brought to men? No, the fact is a sad one, but nevertheless true, that only a very small proportion of the people ever dream of associating the joys of Christmas with the blessed truth which Christmas commemorates.

The season is traditionally a joyous one; but, far too many forget to ask why this is so; and so it becomes the faithful Catholic Churchman to do all that in him lies to dissipate this cloud of indifference to spiritual things which so envelops those around him.

Why does the church call upon us to keep Christmas tide? Is it not that she may ever keep before our minds the most important historical fact in the universe—the fact that God the Son became man, that He who was Divine, Self-existent, the source of all existence, actually condescended to divest Himself for a time of the glory which He had with His Father before the world was,—simply and solely out of his great love for poor, frail, sinful humanity? Is it not that she may continually remind man, that, though he has sinned, yet God's mercies are still as much alive as ever they were? Is it not that she may tell to her children the wondrous Story ever new—yet ever old—of the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem, whose life, and work, and teaching have revolutionized the world? Surely the teaching of the church, at this Holy Season, is clear, definite, and distinct; and Churchmen are wanting in their duty, if they do not realize this truth for themselves, and seek by every means in their power to help others to its realization.

How does the church expect her children to keep Christmas? In the first place, by carefully preparing for, and reverently receiving, the Blessed Body and Blood of Christ, in the Holy Communion. All through the Christian ages, the faithful have observed Christmas in this way; indeed, so eager were men of old to give to their Master Christ the first fruits of their devotion, that they held their only night communion at midnight on Christmas Eve, and so began the day of Christ's nativity—at Christ's altar. Surely, if there is any occasion when the Holy Eucharist should be offered, it is at the Feast of Christ's nativity; for, is not the Holy Eucharist a pledge of the fact that God once "taber-

nacled" among men, aye, and more than that, is it not the assurance that He, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever—even now deigns to come down to earth, in a spiritual manner, and dwell with "his own?"

But more the church calls upon her children, at this time, to remember the poor and lowly condition of the Blessed Babe of Bethlehem—Born in a stable—cradled in a manger—and, remembering that, she bids them seek out the poor, and the friendless, and the desolate—and succour them, for the Master's sake.

Yet, once more—on the first Christmas Eve, the Angels, that hovered over the "holy fields of Bethlehem," sang "Peace on Earth," so, our mother—the church—says to us "Strive at this time to be at peace with all men; try to minimise your differences; seek to be in love and charity with everyone; realize the fact that every good gift comes from God, and that He, who is Love, wills his gifts to be distributed broadcast."

Until the church fully realizes the fact that the majority of men keep Christmas and they would a heathen Saturnalia, and never for a moment think of the wondrously comforting truths which this season teaches, she will not be fulfilling the function which the Master has given to her.

We cannot insist too strongly on pressing home the great doctrine of the Incarnation of the Eternal Son of God. Upon it depends the whole fabric of the Christian Faith; without it Christianity would simply be a faith—one of many—nothing more than the systems of Buddha and Confucius.

So keenly did St. Francis of Assisi feel the importance of impressing the doctrine of the Incarnation upon the popular mind, that he introduced into the church—Christmas carols—all of which, in language more or less crude, appealed to the popular ear, and kept alive the fundamentals of the Faith. And we do well to follow his example. Indifferentism and agnosticism are everywhere rampant, and have to be met. Keep the strains of "The old, old story of Jesus and His love" ever ringing in people's ears, and some will listen.

A Christmas spent in this way must have good results.

Gloria in excelsis Deo!