

Seton MAGAZINE



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Every day at Seton, gathered before the altar at our noon Angelus, we offer prayers for our families and friends. We encourage you also to pray for other homeschooling families, especially those who may be suffering from illness, unemployment, or other crosses.

We are all united in the Communion of Saints, and God allows us through our prayers to uphold, support, and console other members of His Church. Let us, then, remember to pray for one another as we all walk the path of homeschooling, so that we may all join together in prayer, one day, in Heaven.



A Holy Christmas

A Celebration of the Christian Family

BY DR. MARY KAY CLARK

We spend the month of December thinking about and planning for Christmas in one way or another. With all the hectic activity of December—preparing for Christmas parties, buying gifts, cleaning the house—it's easy to forget that we should mainly be preparing our hearts, souls, and homes for the birth of the Christ Child.

God could have become man without being born into a family. He could have simply appeared from nowhere, having no familial attachments, and preached the word he wanted to bring. Because He chose to come as a baby, and grow up through childhood into manhood in the midst of a family, we need to consider that God means to teach us something important through the family life of His Son Jesus Christ.

Subject to Authority

Though we do not know many details about the early life of Jesus in His family, we do know that he was “subject” to his parents, meaning that He recognized the authority of His parents and obeyed their directives. This certainly gives children and adults a model to follow. So many times in life, we feel that we know better than those in authority, and we can come to resent following orders that don't make sense to us. Jesus certainly “knew better” than those He obeyed, but He obeyed anyway, giving us an example to emulate.

It is certainly not coincidental that the first miracle of Jesus was at the request of His mother. And the fact that it occurred at a wedding feast is also significant. We see in this event not only the honor due to a mother, but also the honor due to marriage, which is intimately bound up with motherhood and fatherhood.

Marriage is a natural relationship, which has always existed. Jesus raised marriage

from a merely natural relationship to a supernatural relationship by making it a sacrament. St. Paul tells us that marriage, in a mysterious way, exemplifies the relationship of Christ and His Church. In that sense, a Christian marriage is the most profound relationship that anyone can have on Earth.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that “grace is a participation in the life of God” (#1997). While all the sacraments bring us this grace, marriage allows a further participation in the work of God. God creates human beings so that He may love them, and they may love Him. But God relies on human beings to participate in this creation. In marriage, the spouses share in the creative activity of God; and not merely in the creation of new people, but also in the creation of new Christians, through the Baptism of their children and bringing them up in the Faith.

We see in Christmas not only the celebration of the birth of the Christ Child, but also the celebration of the Christian family. As the Holy Family sheltered in the barn in Bethlehem, they simultaneously had little and everything. They had little shelter, little food, little clothing. But they had the love and support of each other, which was everything they really needed.

Love & Support

In our own Christian families, and especially in homeschooling families which often have only one income, we may experience similar material deprivations. But we can experience the same love and support which characterized the Holy Family.

When your children are grown, they won't think much about the extra car you didn't have, or the trips you didn't take, or the nice clothes you didn't buy. They



won't remember what toys they wanted for Christmas, or what toys they got for Christmas. They won't remember the racecar that was so important to them, or the sled they couldn't do without, or the fashionable boots they just had to have.

But they will remember putting the lights and ornaments on the Christmas tree. They will remember sipping hot chocolate, listening to Christmas carols, watching the flickering of the colored lights in a darkened room. They will remember placing Jesus in the manger, with Mary and Joseph, and the shepherds looking on. They will remember having their family around, and playing games, and singing songs, and baking cookies. They won't remember the things, but they will remember the joy.

Merry Christmas!



Dr. Mary Kay Clark has been the Director of Seton Home Study School for more than 30 years. She writes columns for the *Seton Magazine* and is the author of *Catholic Homeschooling: A Handbook for Parents*.



your Questions ANSWERED

BY DR. MARY KAY CLARK

My friend wants to know if she can enroll her daughter in January. And if so, will Seton accept credits for the half-year high school courses?

Seton does accept credits from other high schools. However, if there are too many non-academic courses, such as sewing and cooking and gym, we would need to adjust her curriculum to make sure she completes the required courses for graduation. We require a certain number of English, math, foreign language, and so on, and cannot substitute an elective for a required course for graduation.

My daughter will be starting 8th grade in the fall, but I need to reassure my husband that she will be prepared for high school courses.

Seton is very dedicated about our students being adequately prepared for the high school program. If students in 8th grade do well in the English and composition courses, they should do well in most of the high school courses. Another important area is Algebra. An 8th grade student should obtain good grades in 8th grade pre-algebra to do well in 9th grade Algebra. If your daughter needs extra help, there are many possible sources. If your student is using the Saxon Algebra 1/2 book, Seton has DVD's which go along with the book and explain the problems in depth. Alternatively, there is plenty of help available online for specific math topics, such as from Khan Academy. For more personalized help, some parents find a tutor to help for an hour once a week.

We enrolled in Seton late. Where do we start? How do I do parent grades?

Families can enroll at any time, so no one is late. The "yearly" schedule is up to you as well as the rate at which your child progresses through the courses. No matter when you enroll your children, you

should start at the beginning of the Seton grade level lesson plans. You need to make sure that your child has learned whatever Seton included from the beginning of that grade level.

You will quickly identify which lessons your child has already learned and can advance through rather quickly. One way to "test" your child is to have him do the assignments at the end of the chapters, and take the chapter tests. If your child obtains a perfect or nearly perfect score in Chapter One math, repeat the same procedure for Chapter Two math. Perhaps by the time your child takes Chapter Three, you will realize he needs to study his multiplication tables, and do the problems in Chapter Three. Then you can continue from there.

You likely will find your son needs to work more in some areas and not as much in others. This is one reason why home schooling is the best kind of schooling: the lessons can be adjusted subject by subject, according to the needs and abilities of the individual student!

Parent grades give the parent the option of having Seton average parent weekly grades or tests with the tests graded by Seton. Parent grades are optional but usually raise the quarter grade for the student. You may enter parent grades on the printed quarter report forms, or you can enter them online.

I love your study guides. Why don't you have them for all your courses?

We know that parents like our study guides, and we are happy to provide them, but we do believe that students need to get used to making their own study guides. Part of the study process is making an outline of the material, and then studying from it. Once our graduates reach college, they will basically be on their own for studying, so good skills at making study

guides will become essential. An important part of the study and learning process, in fact an important part of obtaining a good education, is for the student to make his or her own study guide.

Making a study guide is not difficult. We encourage parents to help their children make study guides in much the same way a parent would teach a job around the house: show your child how to do it, then help your child do one or two, then watch your child do one or two on his own with your critique, then encourage your child to do his own in all his courses.

The Seton website has a study skills course and the directions for making an outline, which is what a study guide is. It is included in the last few lessons of the course.

For additional help, there are sample study guides/outlines on the internet, and some are presented in videos.

The key to a good study guide is to keep it short but meaningful in using key words and key ideas, and not make it so long and so complex that it is impossible to study. In that sense, each student must create and use a few study guides to see what works best for him or her.

My son does not have a learning disability but tends to drift off in his own little world. Do you have any suggestions to keep him on track?

Students like this tend to be overlooked in a classroom situation, and often fall seriously behind in the junior high grade levels.

Stay alert to his study habits. Try to recognize the signs of inattention spans; they may relate to certain foods at breakfast or lunchtime. They may relate to not enough activity at certain times of the day. It may even mean he is staying up too late at night. You can correct these situations.

Intersperse the courses which are more



sedentary with the courses which can be more active. One trick I tried with my boys was to give them active household chores between subjects.

If possible, have him help a younger child. Nothing strengthens learning more than teaching. Classroom studies have shown that students with learning problems improve when they teach a younger child.

My son in 4th grade is having trouble with interpreting directions in his phonics and even in his reader. Is this a typical problem with 4th grade boys?

Actually, it is not unusual. The first three grades are rather easy as the young children are beginning to learn facts and simple study skills. In fourth grade, the first “middle school” grade, students are introduced to more challenging reading selections and more challenging ideas.

One thing to consider is simply to slow down and take as much time for the fourth grade courses as your son needs to master the skills. One pattern we notice, however, is that these boys move ahead in math more quickly. Be sure your son is challenged in those areas in which he is doing well and move him ahead in that subject, such as math. In home schooling with Seton, he can take courses in different grade levels according to his ability.

My student is flying through the first grade material and I would like to enroll him in second grade.

We don't encourage students moving ahead into the next grade level unless the student is doing unusually well in all subjects. We would recommend that the student move ahead in only one or two subject areas to see how he does. More

often than not, we see happy children who are very successful in their studies become unhappy as they need to struggle with the more advanced studies in the next grade level. You don't want to dampen their spirit for home schooling.

If your child is finishing up quickly every day, make sure your child has good books to read. Constantly reading books is about the most important thing a second grade student can do to improve in almost all subjects. If your child is somewhat book-averse, try offering a small monetary reward for each book the student reads. It might be the best few dollars you ever spend.

Besides books, consider having your son do a science project with Dad or visit a history museum or become involved in a local home schooling sports activity.

Journey to a SIMPLER Life

The unexpected joys of becoming a one car family!

BY JESSICA WILDE

Jessica is a homeschool mom and traveler. She and her husband Jason live in Austin, Texas with their three children, Grace, Brecklyn and Alex. Together they strive to live a simpler life with a focus on spending time together and seeing God's world. Through travel and Seton, they teach their kids to appreciate and love their neighbors around the world. Follow the Wilde family at www.travelblog.org/Bloggers/Wildetrips/



Notre Dame, Paris

Open yourself to God's will and your dreams will take you down a path you never imagined.

Five years ago, my husband, Jason, had a dream. He was inspired to show us the world and was determined to take the steps necessary to accomplish this goal. Like many families, our biggest problem was money. So, the first step was to find ways to save, which included better budgeting, cutting the cable (TV) and finding more cost efficient cell phone plans. But the one big change that I wasn't quite ready for was selling our second car.

There is no place for selfishness—and no place for fear! Do not be afraid, then, when love makes demands. Do not be afraid when love requires sacrifice. - Pope John Paul II

I was skeptical of the idea of being a one car family. We had two kids and a third on the way. We could easily afford two cars, and I was worried about Jason biking to work, especially with the crazy Houston traffic. To make it even more dramatic, we would have to sell our house and move closer to work just so he could bike. It really did (and still does) sound crazy. But I appreciated Jason's dream of traveling the world

and he soon convinced me of his vision. Within a year we and our kids were excitedly planning our first adventure to Italy.

At around the same time, I began to dream of homeschooling our kids. Our pre-school daughter was reading chapter books on her own, and as a teacher, I was afraid that the public school system would be a step back for her. With a homeschool approach, we could challenge her and keep the momentum going. This turned out to be the best choice for our kids and for our family's travel dream.

TODAY - Travelers!

Today, we are still a one car family, and the lifestyle changes, along with our decision to homeschool, have helped our travel dreams become a reality. We have seen the world from the Pantheon to Paris. Our kids talk non-stop about dog sledding in Alaska, eating squid ink pasta in Peru, and counting the red phone booths in London. I can talk all day about how shooting for a goal teaches you that nothing is impossible. But, one of the most amazing lessons is how God can bless our lives in ways that we never would have expected.



Trust in the Lord with all your heart, on your own intelligence do not rely; In all your ways be mindful of him, and he will make straight your paths. - 3 Proverbs 3: 5-6

Before we became a one car family, Jason and I lived two parallel lives with our own schedules from 8am-5pm and we only shared family time with all of us at morning and night. But when you have to share something as vital to our modern lives as a car, it connects us so that we depend on each other throughout the day. Every night before we go to bed, Jason and I plan the next day and figure out who needs the car. Sometimes he bikes to work, other times he takes the car, and occasionally I drop him off.

You may think this isn't worth the effort. At first it wasn't. Loading three kids into

the car for a twenty minute round trip to work isn't easy. But we have learned to treasure these moments in the car. We listen to music and talk about our day. The kids tell us which country they want to visit next. And they love saying goodbye in four different languages as Dad leaves the car, his co-workers chuckling behind him.

Watch carefully then how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise, making the most of the opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not continue in ignorance, but try to understand what is the will of the Lord. - Ephesians 5:15-17

Because we moved closer to work, we also spend more time together. Now my husband's office is only 10 minutes away by car or bike. We have learned that our time together is our most valuable asset. Not only

do we have more time as a family to play, but my husband uses that extra time to help me teach. He helps the kids with math and plans science experiments with them in the evening. Plus, as an added bonus, we get to have lunch together with Daddy several times a week, whenever he has the car.

The desire to downsize has spread to other aspects of our lives as well. We have simplified our lives by choosing a smaller house with less upkeep and closer to our everyday needs. With less space, we are also very careful about buying things that we don't need. Bigger is not always better. A bigger lawn means more work, and a bigger house means more cleaning and more stuff. While our house is a tiny condo by Texas standards (1400 sq. feet), it is cozy and full of laughter and noise.



Great Wall of China



A Day in the Life

On an average homeschool day, our life is centered around our dining table, since we don't have an extra room for school. The dining table is where we eat, pray and learn together. For our family, the daily school schedule is different, depending on whether we have dance classes, co-op, or a field trip scheduled. Every morning, the kids look in their assignment folder to see their schedule and daily assignments. This has taught the kids to be self-directed and motivated. They often complete handwriting and other self-directed subjects before I have finished cleaning the breakfast dishes. Additional enrichment activities such as books and activities about our next destination usually come later in the day.

When we first chose to homeschool with Seton, it was because of Seton's Catholic roots, accreditation and teacher support. But the one benefit of homeschooling that

has aided our lifestyle the most was the flexibility of having school year round. We now travel when other families are in school, which lowers travel cost and allows us to teach school during the hot Texas summer months. We can then take off all of December and Holy Week to spend time with God and family.

To go on pilgrimage is not simply to visit a place to admire its treasures of nature, art or history. To go on pilgrimage really means to step out of ourselves in order to encounter God where he has revealed himself. - Pope Benedict XVI

One of the greatest joys of homeschooling with Seton is that the curriculum is centered on God. This has helped our family put God first at home and in our travels. We were inspired by the History and Religion curriculum to turn our trips into pilgrimages. Some of our destinations included going to Christmas Mass at Saint Junipero Serra's mission in San Diego,

visiting the tiny house that Saint Rose of Lima lived in as a Dominican tertiary nun in Peru, and listening to Pope Benedict's address in St Peter's Square. Seton has also inspired our kids to have their own travel dreams. When my daughter, Grace, read about Good King Wenceslas in History for Young Catholics, the Czech Republic became her top travel destination. My other daughter, Brecklyn, now dreams of visiting Italy and walking in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi after learning about him in Religion class.

The human heart plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps. - Proverbs 16:9

We dreamed of travel, but God has led the transformation in our family. The changes we made to our lifestyle in order to achieve these dreams have had a much more positive effect than we could have anticipated. Don't be afraid to make sacrifices to make your dreams come true; you never know when your dream will become more beautiful than you ever imagined.

As usual, we already have an exciting adventure planned for the Christmas holidays, starting with Christmas Eve in Denver with family. On Christmas morning, we board the California Zephyr for a scenic, 2-day ride through the Rocky Mountains to San Francisco. After a few days in California enjoying the clam chowder and Mission Dolores (another St. Serra mission), we are flying to Thailand where we will spend a week in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, fulfilling our daughter's wish of playing with elephants.



Colosseum, Rome





How Far Is It to Bethlehem?

by Michele Suner of Florida

How far is it to Bethlehem? / Not very far. / Shall we find the stable room / Lit by the star?

Many of us are filled with the desire to go back in time to witness the miracle of Christ's birth. Perhaps we would like to be one of the shepherds told the great news by an angel host. Or perhaps we would take the place of one of the Magi, bringing costly gifts and bowing in homage to the Savior of the world. Maybe we would even like to be one of the animals in the stable that kept Jesus warm. We are reminded of this desire to be at Bethlehem every Christmas, when we see the crèche in churches or in our own homes. In the above lines, Frances Chesterton wonders, "How far is it to Bethlehem?" It seems that it is thousands of miles and thousands of years away.

Can we see the little Child? / Is He within? / If we lift the wooden latch / May we go in?

We look around at Christmastime and despair at the rampant and unbridled materialism of the world. Everyone seems to have lost sight of the true meaning of Christmas behind the shiny new toys and gadgets. The crowded stores and advertisements on TV contribute to the alteration of the original concept of this holy Feast. Christmas runs the risk of being seen as that occasion once a year to spend precious money on ungrateful relatives. It is almost impossible to escape the rush of worldly materialism around Christmastime. To us who know Christ, these are cheap, petty substitutes for the real Treasure. Despite all our best efforts, Bethlehem seems farther than ever.

Great kings have precious gifts / And we have nought; / Little smiles and little tears / Are all we have brought.

We may despair at what little we have to offer Jesus. We remember the Magi who came from far-off lands to give Christ gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Beyond that, they gave Jesus their homage and worship. We marvel at the splendors of the saints and wonder if we could ever be that holy. Surely, they had much, so much to offer God! Yet we often forget that they did not think so. Most of the saints knew themselves to be unworthy, too.

No mere human being, stained by Original Sin, is completely worthy of the majesty and awe of God. "Lord, I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof," we pray at every Mass. But at every Mass, Christ deigns to come into our hearts, unworthy as we are. Such is the mercy of God! The best we can offer is our whole selves: our joys and sufferings, our "little smiles and little tears." Jesus came to earth as a child, not as a conquering King with riches and glory. Perhaps it was to remind us that we must all have hearts as simple as those of children.

God in His mother's arms / Babes in the byre, / Sleep, as they sleep who find / Their Heart's Desire.

How far is it to Bethlehem? The answer is: not very far. For in the heart of each true child of God, Christ is born and lives within.

Excerpts of poetry from "How Far Is It to Bethlehem: The Plays and Poetry of Frances Chesterton," compiled by Nancy Carpentier Brown.

Christmas Essay Winner

Our Christmas essay contest was a tremendous success! We received eighty-five entries, far more than we expected! The judging was difficult; we really didn't take into account that our students are trained very well in the art of writing.

The judges each had their own favorites, but the semi-finalists still numbered in the dozens. In fact, all who entered earn a big "Honorable Mention" due to the uniformly high quality of the work. Many thanks to all who entered!

Our third place winner is Nikolai Brelinsky from North Carolina. Second place fell to Andrew Murphy, from the other side of the world, Australia. Our first place winner is Michele Suner, from Florida. All three essays will be published on Seton Magazine online. Congratulations to all!



Keeping the Spirit of Christmas **Alive**

In today's fast-paced and voraciously consumptive culture, it is hardly less difficult to celebrate Christmas than it is to remember Advent. Truth be told, it isn't easy to keep the Christmas spirit alive, especially after Christmas, when everyone else seems to have forgotten that it ever was Christmas.

Last month, we ran an article that presented several ways to celebrate Advent, using that time to prepare ourselves and our families for the coming of Christ. This month, we look at ways to rejoice in the birth of our Savior, keeping that joyful and grateful spirit alive even while our neighbors take down their trees and pack up the decorations. Perhaps some of these Seton family traditions will lend you inspiration this year. (Thank you, once again, to all who shared their Christmas traditions with us on Facebook.)

As you bring out the old traditions and perhaps, celebrate new ones this year, everyone at Seton Home Study School wishes you and your family the most blessed Christmas season. May the light of the newborn Child give you joy and hope for the coming year, and may He bless you with every grace during this holy Christmas season.



Christ-Centered Traditions

Christmas is the birthday of Jesus, so it is hardly surprising that many Christmas traditions focus on the baby Jesus.

- ☐ Read a different Gospel account of the Nativity for Christmas Day and the days immediately following.

- ☐ Sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus on Christmas morning.

- ☐ Craft a large birthday cake that says "Happy Birthday, Jesus" to add to your lawn's Nativity display from Christmas Day through New Year's.

- ☐ Bake a special birthday cake for dessert after dinner on Christmas Day...or serve the cake for breakfast, as some families do.

- ☐ Have your children 'travel' the Magi figurines through the house, making their way closer and closer to Jesus in the manger every day until January 6th, the Feast of the Epiphany.





Caring for the Less Fortunate

Giving presents to our family and friends is all very well and good, but we might do more by adding remembrance of the poor and suffering.

- ☐ Give up one gift each from among your own Christmas gifts to pass to a family in need.

- ☐ Bake cookies to give to the homeless.

- ☐ Volunteer groceries and time to provide a festive dinner at a shelter during the Christmas season.

- ☐ Organize caroling trips to nursing homes after Christmas.

- ☐ Participate in a Christmas care package drive for soldiers.



Ethnic cooking

Many of us have inherited cultural traditions that determine what we serve throughout the Christmas season, whether it be the traditional French goose for Christmas dinner, or the Mexican *Rosca de Reyes* (Kings' Ring) pastry on Epiphany. Ethnic cooking traditions connect us to the past, bringing us closer to our families and to the truth that Christ was born to save all who humble themselves to worship at the stable.



Gifting Differently

Many Catholics like to handle gift-giving just a bit differently from the rest of the world, allowing Christmas Day to be about Jesus and simultaneously expanding the Christmas celebration beyond December 25th.

- ☐ Give a gift a day for the 12 days of Christmas.

- ☐ Save the presents for Epiphany in commemoration of the Three Kings.

- ☐ On New Year's Day, have each child wrap one possession to give to a sibling who has expressed interest and pleasure in the item over the preceding year.



Family Time

Ask people their favorite memories of Christmas-time, and you'll find most recount memories of family togetherness.

- ☐ Starting Christmas night, read a good Christmas story together as a family each night of the Christmas season.

- ☐ Alternatively, watch a good Christmas film together every evening until the Epiphany. Make it an event with popcorn and other treats.

- ☐ Plan a family Christmas show with relatives and friends, complete with skits, Christmas carols, and recitations.

- ☐ Each day that Christmas cards arrive in the mail, say a special Christmas prayer at the dinner table for those whose cards arrived that day.



Christine Smitha holds a B.A. in English and Literature from Christendom College. She has taught Literature for nine years, and enjoys dabbling in journalism when she gets a chance. She is currently Seton Home Study School's Accreditation Manager.



What You May Have Missed

As some of you may not know, I write a weekly blog over at SetonMagazine.com. Included below are samples that amount to a “Best of” collection. If you like my writing in this column, there’s a good chance that you will like my writing over there. (Of course, I am aware that the reverse is also true.)

John Clark, a Christendom College graduate, holds a degree in Political Science and Economics. He is a popular writer and speaker at family and homeschooling conferences.

John Clark writes at setonmagazine.com/johnclark



A Day at the Spa for Homeschooling Moms

Spa day is my sadly imperfect way of doing for my wife what the rest of the world doesn’t often do—show her that her life as homeschooling mother is incredibly meaningful. It’s just a simple observation that if the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world, that hand deserves painted nails.

[Read the rest online](#)



Airbrushing My Life

When others look at her, I don’t know what they see, but I see someone who has loved her children, laughed with them, cooked for them, sacrificed for them, cried over them, and prayed for them. I see someone who loves God. I see someone whom God loves. I see someone who loves me. It’s all right there in her face. Some might call it “aging.” I call it beauty. And it doesn’t need correction.

[Read the rest online](#)



Why Does Coffee Always Get the Blame?

Implicit in the anti-coffee comments like the one above is the idea that coffee is a needless luxury. Not only do I disagree with that as an economist (coffee clearly falls under “need” as opposed to “want”), I disagree from the perspective of theology. Some time ago, I remember Lisa telling me about disclaled orders who start their day with a bowl of java. In other words, there are religious orders of people who don’t have shoes—but do have coffee.

[Read the rest online](#)



Is a Holy Hour a Date?

We were young, Catholic, and broke. (Come to think of it, not much has changed... except the “young.”) Oh, and to you young Catholic men out there: if you don’t think reading Aquinas with a girl is romantic, you’re with the wrong girl.

[Read the rest online](#)



3 Essential Books for Learning Catholic Dogma

The work is rarely referred to by its title. Instead, it is almost always referred to by the name of the author. Say the word “Denzinger” in a crowd of Catholic theologians, and you’re letting everyone know that you’re about to bring out your queen. It’s the shorthand way of saying: “OK. Playtime’s over. Let’s find out what the Church actually teaches.

[Read the rest online](#)



What the Horse Can Teach Us About Courage

Why does the horse laugh at fear? Why is he so excited to go into battle? The answer is simple: because the horse loves his master, and he knows his master loves Him. The horse isn’t afraid of battle. The horse isn’t afraid of injury. The horse has one fear and one fear only: separation from His master. That’s all any of us should truly fear: separation from God.

[Read the rest online](#)



Fathers, Children, and the Mercy of the Fourth Commandment

In your father, God has given you the human equivalent of a guardian angel. I had one growing up. By the love of God, I still do. As I get older, my Dad keeps looking out for me. By the mercy of God, as he gets older, I sometimes have the honor of looking out for him.

[Read the rest online](#)

Thank you for reading my columns again this year. You homeschool Moms and Dads and kids are my heroes. If you have any thoughts about my columns or what I should be writing about next year, please send me an email. I would love to hear from you! johnfclark@live.com

Please keep me and my family in your prayers this Christmas, and please know that all of you are in our prayers. *Merry Christmas!*



5 Ways to Simplify Your Christmas Week

Mary Ellen writes at setonmagazine.com/maryellen



Mary Ellen Barret is mother of seven children and two in heaven. Mary is wife to David and a lifelong New Yorker. She has homeschooled her children for eleven years using Seton and an enormous amount of books.

The week leading up to Christmas can be a very stressful one for us homeschool moms, maybe even more so because the children are with us all day long. We have gifts to wrap, cooking and baking to accomplish, trees to decorate, relatives to appease, and it all must be done with a gaggle of super-excited children under our feet. It can seem completely overwhelming and make one long for the good old days of July Fourth when all you had to do was throw some meat on the grill and make sure everyone was slathered in sunscreen. There are ways to make the week a little calmer and thereby a little more pleasant for everyone.

1. Have Dad Take the Kids Out

Generally, I am not in the habit of farming my kids out whenever the going gets tough but Christmas week is different. If you try to make some magic for your children on Christmas morning, the element of surprise is helpful, and to provide that you need some kid-free time. Arranging for your husband to take the children out for a few hours the weekend before Christmas would work.

You could get gifts wrapped, something baked without “help” or get the house thoroughly cleaned so you start the week with a sense of order. I have also done a kid

swap with a friend for this purpose. I will take her kids for a few hours in the morning and then she takes mine for a few hours that afternoon. We each get some time to tie up loose ends in the house and the kids get two playdates in one day.

2. Gather the Clothes Together

Whether you attend the vigil Mass on the eve or morning Mass on Christmas day, it can be hectic getting everyone ready and out the door. Gather all the Christmas outfits a few days early and store them in your own room so nothing disappears. Don’t forget shoes and socks. Have you ever flown

into Mass late because one kid can’t find one shoe? Be prepared early and then the dressing will be easy

3. Stay Home as Much as Possible.

So many nice events accompany Christmas: the parish Santa breakfast, the Knights of Columbus party, the homeschool families’ caroling party. It can keep you even more on the go than usual. Be very selective in what you say yes to doing and where you go and how long you stay. Staying home ensures bedtimes are observed, sugar intakes are checked and excitement kept to a manageable pitch. Spend time home as a

family reading Christmas books, watching Christmas movies, singing hymns and carols and just observing the season in a way that is meaningful to your family.

We love to drink cocoa while I read aloud *A Christmas Carol* every year. There is also the annual contest to see who has memorized "Twas The Night Before Christmas". It is all very silly, but a lot of fun. We also read the Nativity story from our collection of picture books as well as from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

4. Keep to Your Routines.

This is a tough one. It really does help to get the children to bed at their regular bedtimes as much as possible, to have meals occur when meals usually occur and to limit the screen time as much as you usually do. If you allow a free-for-all in the name of holiday merry-making, what you will have is some overtired, over sugared, bug eyed little people at Mass on Christmas morning and that rarely works out well for anyone. Don't ask me how I know this.

5. Plan One Surprise.

When my older children were quite young, I put a letter to each of them from Baby Jesus in their Christmas stockings. Very formal paper and flowing handwriting told them how special they each were to Him and asked them to always be close to Him in prayer. They were thrilled.

Another year, I gave each child a few red hot candies and took them out into the front yard and had them sprinkle them around. The next morning there were plastic candy canes sprouting all over from their "seeds". Their little faces were worth my husband and I digging in the cold to plant those blasted things. One little bit of extra Christmas magic will create such special memories and foster family bonding.

These days with your family are meant to draw you ever closer to each other and to God, not to stress you out or make you miserable, so enjoy your family, hold close to your traditions, and let the love of a Child fill your heart.



The Nelson Family

The Nelson Family has a few Christmas traditions. To keep it short and sweet, we'll tell you something old, something new, something borrowed and something ... creative!

OLD: We like to make our favorite Christmas cookie, "cinchi fritti" which was a recipe of Great Grandma Anna. Jen has been making these cookies with her family since she was little. We take our baked goods to The Webbers, who host an annual Christmas cookie party! This is something they have been doing for years, and have graciously opened up their home to all their friends with all our little ones! Everyone always leaves with a great assortment of goodies made with love!

NEW: This year, we are giving each child money to purchase gifts for their siblings, and to give to charity. We want to instill in them the spirit of giving. Our friend Barbara taught us that true J O Y is Jesus first, Others second and Yourself last. How great to keep this in mind at Christmas!

BORROWED: Derek's mom fills stockings for the grandchildren on Christmas morning that were made by her mom for each one of her grandchildren. It is neat that our kids get to pick little presents out of the same stocking their dad did when he was little!

CREATIVE: Something we try to do is evangelize through our Christmas cards, which always have a themed photo with the children. One year they held signs that said, "Jesus is the Reason." Last year, they were angels singing "Glory to the Newborn King!" This year, with the addition of baby Emmanuella, we will have our very own Nativity scene complete with Mary (Gianna), Joseph (Gabriel), Baby Jesus (Emmanuella) and the Angel (Lucianna).

Merry Christmas!



The McCormick Clan

*Wouldn't life be worth the living
Wouldn't dreams be coming true
If we kept the Christmas spirit
All the whole year through?*

~Author Unknown

Merry Christmas!

Merry Christmas

From the Seton Featured Families!



The Kerbis Family

For our Christmas tradition, we love to celebrate St. Nicholas Day. The little ones really look forward to putting out a shoe.

The night before, they carefully choose the biggest shoe they have (sometimes a boot) and set it out near the door. When they wake in the morning, they have received candy gold coins, some new Christmas socks, and a small treat.

This is a tradition our family has done since our oldest was young. Merry Christmas!



The Stowell Family

We would like to wish all of the Seton Staff, Parents and Students a very joyful Christmas.

An Irish Christmas Blessing.

*"The light of the Christmas star to you,
The warmth of home and hearth to you,
The cheer and good will of friends to you,
The hope of a childlike heart to you,
The joy of a thousand angels to you,
The love of the Son,
And God's peace to you."*

Our family's favorite traditions are Midnight Mass and time with family. We usually do *all* of the baking before Christmas; dozens and dozens of cookies of all kinds, at least 6 different kinds of fudge, peanut butter balls, coconut balls, a variety of breads, dozens of pies, and hand painted chocolates. We start before Thanksgiving and usually finish up on Christmas Eve.

Merry Christmas!



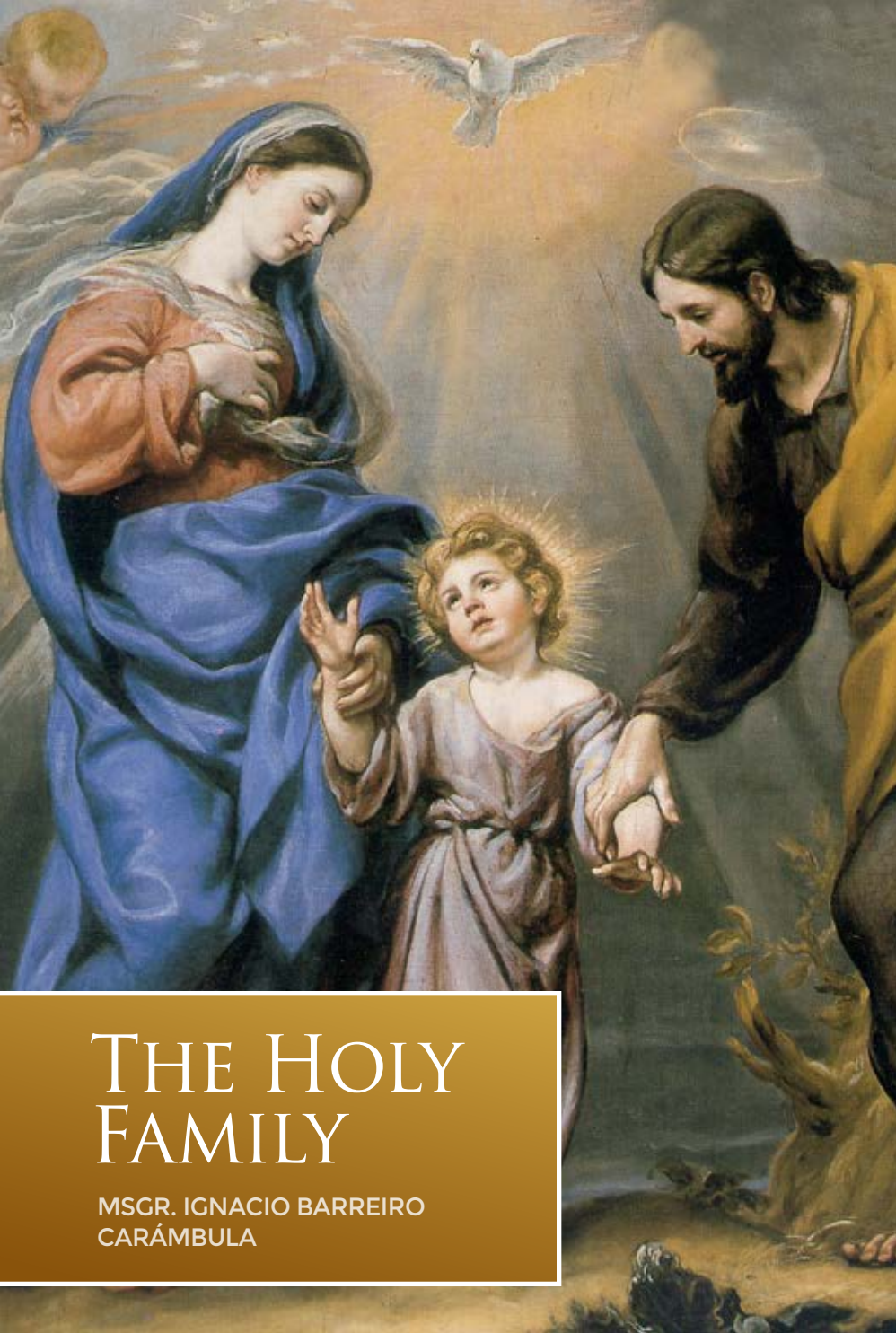
The Agar Family

It all began when Johnny was four and Annie was two. "Let's have a caroling party!," I suggested to my husband. Three feet of snow and three weeks later, we had forty people gathered at our house one night to eat and spread Christmas cheer by going house to house caroling. That was seventeen years ago.

We have kept it a tradition every year since then, through new births, moves, blizzards and ice storms. We have grown our circle of family and friends from forty to around one hundred attendees and our family looks forward to it more each year. Families arrive in festive attire, Christmas music is playing, and lots of food is ready to be eaten.

After dinner we don our red scarves and Santa hats, grab our candles and music books and head out to carol through the neighborhood. It is such a wonderful time to share with people you are close to. While the hot cocoa afterwards may warm our bodies, it is the gathering of family and friends that warms our heart. Merry Christmas to all of you! May God's blessings be yours this Christmas!

Jeff, Becki, Johnny, Annie & Grace Agar



THE HOLY FAMILY

MSGR. IGNACIO BARREIRO
CARÁMBULA

We should venerate the Holy Family during the whole year, but there is a particular appropriateness in meditating on the family of God during Advent and Christmas, so that we may come to know and love the Holy Family better and follow their teachings with greater fidelity.

Three persons form the Holy Family: the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, and Jesus. Each of these three persons was exceptional in more than one way, but during the thirty years of the hidden life of Christ, save some extraordinary moments, most of the life of this family was entirely normal. For that reason, the information that the Gospels provides us concerning this period of Christ's life is limited. Without

any doubt, the most important lesson that we can learn from this hidden life of Christ, a life that was lived most of the time in the happy normalcy of a family, is that we are called to sanctify all the moments of our everyday existence. Sanctity can and should be achieved in the habitual circumstances of a family, without waiting for any extraordinary calls or events.

MEDITATING ON THE FAMILY

We begin our contemplation with the Blessed Virgin Mary. She was chosen from all creatures to be the Mother of God, Co-redemptrix of humanity, and Guide for the newly-formed Church's first steps after the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ. A particularly rich point of meditation lies in the great gift Mary received of being conceived without original sin. She was free from all the weakness that normally besets human nature.

Before the Annunciation, she was given an exceptional education in the Temple of Jerusalem, which means she was the best possible human educator for her Son. Because her mind was not impaired by the wound of original sin, she was able to possess a degree of understanding of her divine motherhood. It was her great joy to fulfill a unique mission in the process of our salvation, but at the same time, she suffered the sorrows that Simeon at the Presentation in the Temple had prophesied would be hers. We can imagine that these sorrows would have grown as Mary saw how many people rejected her Son, especially during His public ministry.

Next, we think of St. Joseph, a man of great and exceptional holiness, chosen by God for the unique mission of protecting and guiding His family on Earth. In Scripture, Joseph is called a just man (Mt. 1:19), a title sparingly used in both the Old and New Testaments to refer to a person of great virtue. He was a man who heard angels speak. Following the guidance of an angel, he accepted the Divine Maternity of Our Lady, in spite of its apparent strangeness, especially given that he likely knew of Mary's vow of virginity, which itself was so unusual in Israel at that time. Although we do not know the time of his death, tradition holds that Joseph died before the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. He died with Jesus and Mary at his side, and because of that he is the patron of holy death. Because he served as the protector and guide for the Lord's family on Earth, St. Joseph is also the Patron of the Church.

Finally, we consider Jesus, Who on the one hand possessed infused knowledge due to His divine nature, but on the other hand was required to grow gradually like all persons due to His human nature. As

any other human being, Jesus had to learn many social things and basic human skills such as walking and speaking; otherwise, His incarnation would not have been real. In this human development, Jesus was completely obedient to His parents (Lk. 2:51). Both God and man were able to witness how He advanced in wisdom and age (Lk. 2:52).

IMAGINE THE INTERACTIONS

It is worth imagining the interaction amongst Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. How full of love and concern for one another it must have been, with a limitless charity toward each other in everything they said or did, in all circumstances of their lives, at crucial times and in their common everyday existence! Jesus did not have any of our imperfections in His human nature since he was untouched by sin, so he would have been a quick learner. However, in the normal course of human learning to which Jesus submitted by reason of His incarnation, Mary and Joseph would still have had to teach Him with the patience that teaching a child always requires. Although we do not have clear historical proof, it is commonly held that Jesus learned the trade of His foster father and became a carpenter. Imagine the love of this Divine Son, who took lessons from St. Joseph and used the trade He had learned thereby to support His mother after the death of Joseph.

Holy Scripture does mention on different occasions (though usually without providing much detail) that the Holy Family had relatives and that they interacted with their extended family. We cannot doubt that the Holy Family exercised a charitable action towards their extended family in an effort to bring about their full conversions. Certainly, there was a loving concern amongst the Holy Family and their relatives. This was demonstrated very early by Mary when she went in haste, as St. Luke tells us, to the assistance of her cousin Elizabeth for the birth of St. John the Baptist (Lk. 1:39). At the foot of the Cross, Mary herself was supported by several pious women, one of whom was Mary of Cleophas, called Mary's sister by St. John (Jn. 19:25), and thus likely to have been a close relative of the Blessed Mother, based on biblical use of the term. It is important to note that Jesus experienced failures in

the effort to convert relatives. St. John tells us that "not even His brethren believed in Him" (Jn. 7:5). Jesus provides us a worthy example here as He continued to love His brethren and to seek their conversion, in spite of their continued rejection.

The Holy Family can serve as our guide in so many undertakings. In particular, they should guide our efforts to prepare young couples for marriage, to strengthen families, and to come to the assistance of couples in crisis. It is important to remember that the best formation for marriage is the one that each member of the future couple receives from his or her own parents. Catholic families who form their children in the faith also prepare them to be good husbands and wives.

ADOPTED INTO GOD'S FAMILY

Our knowledge of the Holy Family should also lead us to meditate on the fact that through divine adoption, we are all called to be part of the Family of God. We received the great gift of divine filiation at Baptism, and received from the hands of Jesus Himself on the Cross, His own mother for ours.

The Holy Family is the "prototype and example for all Christian families" (*Familiaris Consortio*, n.86) because the Lord when He created the family had as an exemplar the Family of Nazareth. For that reason, it behooves us to try to imitate the virtues of this family. In the same fashion, when God created man, he had as model the humanity of Christ. We should not be discouraged if we have such a high model to imitate because the Lord will always give us the graces to progress on our spiritual path. We need only be concerned with total simplicity of heart to follow the particular road that the Lord has marked for each of us.

At Christmas this year, let us ask the Holy Family to inspire us with their virtue, that we may become pure as the Blessed Mother, righteous as St. Joseph, humble as the Child Jesus, and full of the charity that reigns in their hearts.



Msgr. Ignacio Barreiro Carámbula has been the Executive Director of the Rome office of Human Life International. Msgr. Barreiro has published hundreds of articles on theological and life issues, and historical subjects in popular and scholarly publications.



setonhome.org/colleges

Christmas Recipes



From the Shanley Family

This season we are blessed with being grandparents! It is also a great blessing to see our son Philip, slowly but surely, recover from autism with the help of the GAPS diet. God is so good! For anyone else on this diet, here are recipes for the holidays:

Emma's Peanut Butter Cookies

(Adapted from Better Homes and Gardens New Cookbook)

- ½ cup organic butter
- ½ cup natural peanut butter
- 1¼ cups coconut flour
- ½ cup raw honey
- 1 organic egg
- 1 tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp vanilla

In a mixing bowl, beat butter and peanut butter with an electric mixer on medium to high speed for 30 seconds. Add ½ cup of the flour, the honey, egg, baking soda, and vanilla. Beat until thoroughly combined. Beat in remaining flour. Cover and chill for about an hour. Shape dough into 1 inch balls. Place 2 inches apart on cookie sheet greased with organic coconut oil. Flatten by crisscrossing with a fork. Bake at 375 degrees for 7 to 9 minutes. Makes about 36 cookies.

Chocolate-Peanut Butter Fudge

- 6 tbsp raw honey
- 12 tbsp organic coconut oil
- 3 tbsp natural peanut butter
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 6 tbsp organic cocoa powder
- Dash salt
- ¼ cup coconut flour
- ¼ cup chopped walnuts (optional)

Directions

Heat honey, coconut oil, peanut butter, and vanilla in saucepan on medium heat. Stir frequently until melted. In separate bowl, combine cocoa powder, salt, and flour. Add to saucepan. Stir until combined. If desired, stir in walnuts. Pour into a square or rectangular glass container. Refrigerate for about 3 hours. Cut into squares. Refrigerate leftovers. Enjoy! And God bless!

*From the
Seton Featured
Families!*



From the Perez Family

On Christmas Eve we go to Luigi's parent's house, where we have our Christmas celebration. We read the Gospel and sing traditional Christmas songs in honor of baby Jesus. The family gives thanks for all their blessings and makes petitions; we all kiss baby Jesus and the youngest in the family places Him in the manger. This has been our family Christmas tradition since Luigi and his brothers were kids. It is wonderful to see how this celebration has grown within our family and that the new generation continues with it.

Tembleque (Coconut Pudding)

2 14oz cans coconut milk
2 ¼ cups sugar
½ tsp salt
½ cup cornstarch
ground cinnamon

Directions

In a saucepan, combine the coconut milk, sugar and salt. Bring to a full boil and cook for about 6 minutes, stirring occasionally. In a bowl, combine the cornstarch with ¾ cup of water and, with a whisk, mix well into a slurry. Immediately pour the slurry into the saucepan and cook, continuously whisking until the mixture thickens into a pudding, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat.

Pour the mixture through a colander. Transfer the strained pudding into a nonstick 6" x 12" deep dish. Smooth out the surface, and set aside to cool. Refrigerate about 2 hours. Dust the surface with ground cinnamon, slice, and serve. Serves 10-12.



From the Stowell Family

One of our favorite recipes is one for sugar cookies, given to me by a very wonderful and long time family friend. Merry Christmas from the Stowells!

Jean's Sugar Cookies

2 cups sugar
1 cup lard or shortening
2 eggs
1 cup sour milk or buttermilk
4 tsp baking powder
1 tsp baking soda
1 tsp vanilla (may also use orange or lemon extract)
5 cups flour

Directions

In a large bowl, beat first three ingredients. Add baking powder, baking soda and vanilla (or other flavoring). Add milk and 1c. flour. Beat well. Bake at 350 degrees for about ten minutes, till edges start to turn golden brown. Cool completely.

Cookie frosting: 1 pound bag of confectioners sugar, 1 stick butter, vanilla (or orange or lemon). Beat well. Drizzle milk in while beating till desired consistency.



From the Zimak Family

This is our Grandma's favorite Christmas cookie recipe. She passed away in 2011, and when we bake these delicious, easy-to-make cookies, we can feel her with us. We hope you enjoy them!

Grandma Betty's Shortbread Cookies

½ lb butter (softened)
½ cup confectioners' sugar
2 cups flour
½ tsp salt
¼ tsp baking powder
½ cup granulated sugar

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cream butter, and then gradually add the sugar. Beat well. Mix the flour, salt, and baking powder together in a separate bowl, then add to butter mixture. Combine thoroughly. Roll in balls, and then criss-cross with a fork dipped in flour. Bake at 350 degrees for 10 - 15 minutes (cookies should be slightly brown around the edges). Wait a few minutes and roll cookies in granulated sugar. Makes approximately 1 1/2 to 2 dozen cookies.





and



HAPPY NEW YEAR



*From the Staff at Seton
Home Study School*

2014



A Christmas Song

Simply—in a narrative style

HENRY M. HALVORSON



1. When Ma - ry came to Beth - le - hem from Naz-'reth far a - way,
2. Then Ma - ry smiled and said to him, "Good Jo - seph, don't be sad.



The lit - tle town was crowd - ed for it was the cen - sus day.
The hay is clean and smells so sweet, I'm sure we should be glad:



Though Jo - seph looked and looked a - round to find a place to stay,
For now the time has come for me to bear with - in this fold



Why, all that he could find was just a sta - ble with some hay.
Dear Je - sus, God's be - got - ten Son, as Ga - briel has fore - told."

64

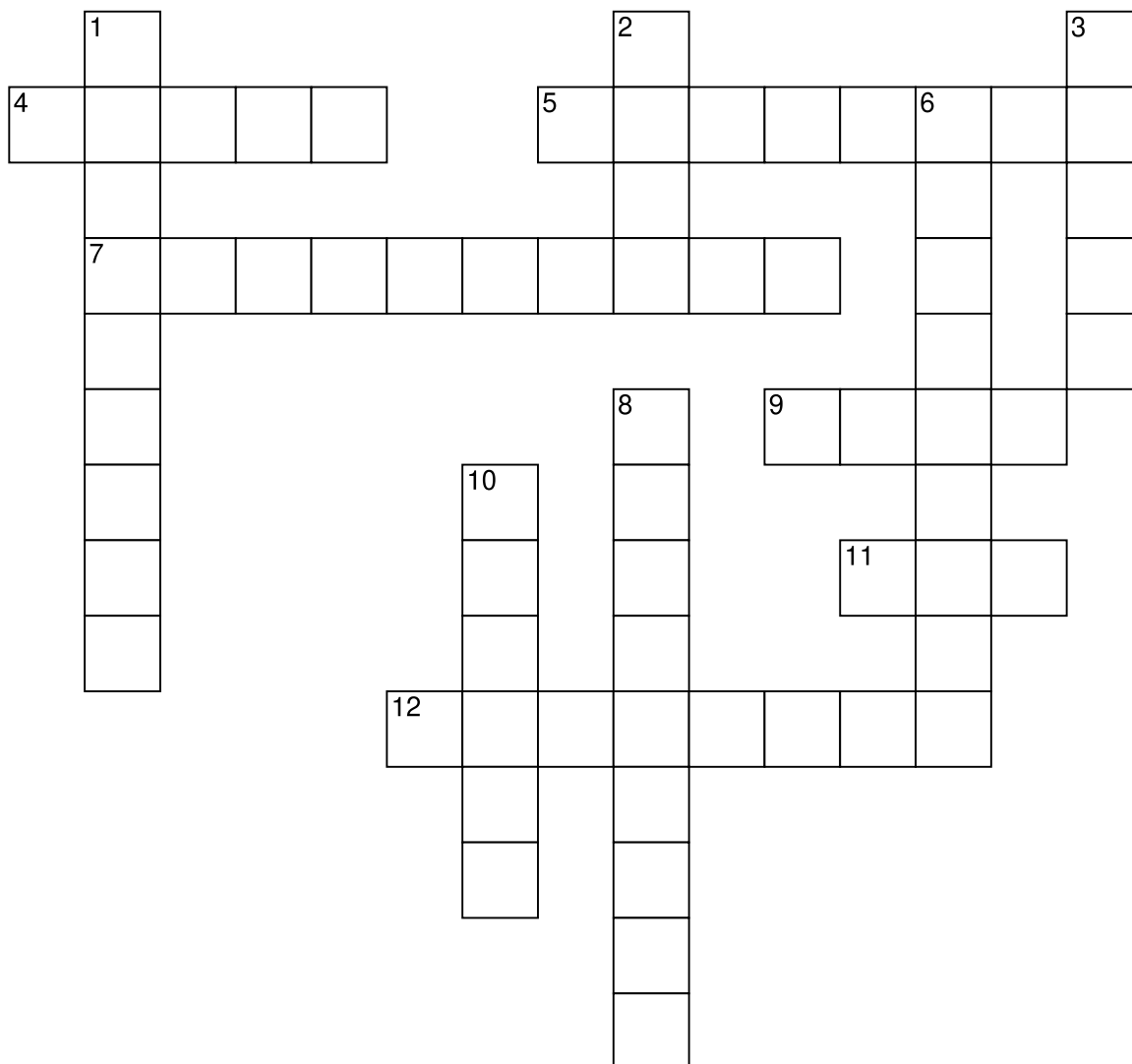


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Christmas Crossword



ACROSS

- 4 king of Judea, ordered the Massacre of the (word from #6 Down)
 5 Christmas is also called the ____ of the Lord.
 7 Their feast is celebrated on December 29th. (two words)
 9 This saint is sometimes depicted as a girl with candles set in a wreath on her head; her name means light.
 11 Jesus was born in a stable because there was no room in the ____.
 12 The real Santa Claus

DOWN

- 1 The city where Jesus was born
 2 The Three Wise Men who came from the East
 3 The Wise men brough Gold, Frankincense, and ____
 6 The children who died as the Holy Family fled to Egypt.
 8 An angel appeared first to these men.
 10 St. Francis ____, a disciple of St. Ignatius of Loyola, was a great missionary in India and Japan.

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Taryn | I was the first person ever to enter as a basic student, receive an award for overall best student of the day, be promoted to staff, and receive overall best cadet NCO staff member of the day, in one encampment.



Teresa | I won the National Scottish Harp Championship of America. Homeschooling allows me the flexibility to spend more time concentrating on developing my harp skills.



Gus, Cal, Aurea | Homeschooling affords us the time and energy to dedicate to training. And our family can train together. Our mom is also a Tae Kwon Do student!

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[The family] is the place where one learns to love, the natural center of human life. It is made up of faces, of persons who love, talk, sacrifice for others and defend life, especially the most fragile, the weakest. It could be said, without exaggeration, that the family is the engine of the world and of history. Each one of us builds his/her own personality in the family, growing up with a mother and father, brothers and sisters, breathing the warmth of the home. The family is the place where we receive our name, the place of affections, the space of intimacy, where we learn the art of dialogue and interpersonal communication. In the family, the person becomes conscious of his/her dignity and, especially if the education is Christian, recognizes the dignity of every individual person, particularly the sick, the weak and the marginalized.

Pope Francis, Address to the Pontifical Commission for the Family, Oct 25, 2013