

A BOUQUET OF CHRISTMAS FEASTS... There is an old saying, "Christmas comes only once a year." Of course, that refers to the material aspect of Christmas and the gifts that people receive. However, for the church, Christmas is not only one day, December 25th- it is also a proper Liturgical Season. The Church wants us to reflect for some period of time upon the miracle of the Incarnation of the Son of God becoming man and taking our human condition. For the secular world, Christmas ends at 12:01 AM on December 26th. The after Christmas sales appear in the newspapers and the stores gear up for the next moneymaking holiday Valentine's Day! But the Church in her wisdom gives us this Season so that we might profit spiritually from the new born Christ Child and learn from Him. There are several feasts that we celebrate during Christmas Season. This Sunday immediately following the Nativity is called the Feast of the Holy Family. On this day we meditate on the holiest family that ever existed-Jesus, Mary and St. Joseph. We learn from the Holy Family of Nazareth the importance of prayer, of sacrifice for one another and work. We ask that the Holy Family bless in a special way our own families. On January 1st as the society celebrates New Years with the descending ball in Time Square, parties and hangovers, the Church begins it a bit more quietly. On New Years Day we celebrate the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God; we begin the new year under the protection of Mary, God's Mother and ours. This feast is meant to commemorate the part played by Mary in the Mystery of our salvation. We think of the singular dignity offered to Mary in becoming the Mother of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The second Sunday following Christmas is called the Epiphany. The word "Epiphany" is a Greek word that means "To Reveal." On this day we recall the visit of the Magi, "The Three Kings" to the infant Savior in Bethlehem. As we all know, the Wise Men came from the east by the guidance of a star and presented Jesus with three special gifts-gold, frankincense, and myrrh. On this feast we reflect upon the fact that salvation was not offered just solely to one particular race and nation but is indeed available to all. We might think about the gifts that we could offer to Jesus-the gold of a good life, the incense of daily prayer, and the myrrh of self-denial. Finally, the last feast of the Christmas Season occurs usually in mid-January-it is the Baptism of Jesus. This particular event might be considered as an inauguration of Jesus' public ministry. Now Christ being sinless had no need for baptism. Yet in his humility, our Lord came to St. John the Baptist at the Jordan and requested it. Let us consider that at our baptism we became God's adopted sons and daughters, specially chosen by Him and partakers in His life and love. Yes, Christmas is more than just "One Day." It comes more often in the hearts of believers who appreciate and treasure of the special presence of the Jesus the word made flesh. May the special feasts of the Church help us to do just that!

Sincerely in Christ,

Father Jerome