



INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

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A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER for December

Come Lord Jesus!
Make us good stewards
of Advent.
Strengthen our faith;
calm our fears.

Come Lord Jesus!
We hear John the Baptist's cry.
Open our hearts.
Give us the humility to repent.

Come, Lord Jesus!
Let us walk in your light!
Show us how we prepare your way;
and make straight your paths.

Come, Lord Jesus!
We give you thanks and praise,
for the shining star and angelic host,
for Mary and Joseph,
good stewards, both.

Come, Lord Jesus!
We rejoice and are glad!
For the Good News you bring
And God's glory you revealed.

Come, Lord Jesus!

Amen!

Stewardship and Christmas: Turning the World Upside Down



For women in the ancient world, motherhood was prized and desired above almost all else. Sacred scripture tells of many women who pleaded with God to let them conceive. From Sarah, the mother of Isaac, to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, the Bible is replete with women who finally, in their old age, were granted the gift of motherhood for which they had begged God. How marvelously significant it is, then, that in the town of Nazareth those many years ago, a young girl named Mary, unmarried and probably feeling altogether unready for motherhood, was visited by an angel who delivered God's plea: would she give God a child? Mary's response is a model *par excellence* for all those who aspire to be good stewards: "Behold, I am the Lord's servant. Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38).

In the words of the Magnificat, Mary proclaims the hope of every good steward: "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Lk. 1:46).

And so the real mystery and beauty of Christmas is delivered: God turns the world upside down. In the words of the *Magnificat*, Mary proclaims the hope of every good steward: "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Lk. 1:46). He has dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart, lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. Here is a new understanding of the God who desires not our begging and our pleas, but our 'yes' to God's invitation to be active stewards in his plan of salvation. For the Christian steward,

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the consumerism, the gaudiness, the excesses of our cultural Christmas can be overcome by answering the call to live simpler lives, to use less, to feed the poor, to quiet ourselves in stillness rather than grow louder in frenzied activity.



In a world which prizes and desires wealth above so many things, the Christian steward finds in the stillness the true hope which lies at the heart of Christmas.

In her book *The Vigil: Keeping Watch in the Season of Christ's Coming*, Professor Wendy Wright from Creighton University writes: "The ancient desert dwellers of our early Christian communities tell us that the surest way into the heart of God is to be still. In being still we learn to be attentive to the vast and hidden stillness that permeates all things."

In a world which prizes and desires wealth above so many things, the Christian steward finds in the stillness the true hope which lies at the heart of Christmas. Christ has come, and he comes again and again, and finally in the end, Christ comes. Once again, God implores us to receive this child in the stillness of our hearts, and respond to his call to transform the world's values – to turn the world upside down.



STEWARDSHIP SAINT FOR DECEMBER

Saint John Damascene, Doctor of the Church

John Damascene, also called John of Damascus, is one of the most influential Christian theologians in church history. His writings influenced many Christian intellectuals including Saint Thomas Aquinas. He is sometimes called the last of the Church Fathers.

Born in Damascus, Syria, to a wealthy Christian family in 657, John was well educated. He succeeded his father as chief financial administrator to the Muslim ruler of Damascus. But heeding a call to religious life, John resigned his office and divided his wealth among his relatives, the Church, and the poor. He was received into a monastic community near Jerusalem, became a monk and was later ordained a priest.

John invested much of his time, energy, and considerable intellectual gifts contributing to the fields of law, theology, philosophy, and music. He wrote prodigiously on issues of faith and in defense of the doctrines of the Church. It has been said that John possessed a profound Catholic sacramental vision. "The one who seeks God continually will find him," he wrote, "for God is in everything."

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In the early 8th century AD, a movement opposed to the veneration and public display of religious icons gained some acceptance by Christian emperors, and edicts were issued ordering the destruction of statues, and other representations of Christ, Mary, and the saints. John penned a passionate defense of Christian artifacts in three separate publications that became popular among the Christian populace.

John's spirited defense of the use of holy images was condemned by the pro-iconoclastic Christian emperors but they were unable to take any action against him, as they did other defenders of icons because, ironically, John lived under the protection of Muslim rule. His writings would later play an important role and prove persuasive during the Second Council of Nicaea, which was convened to settle the dispute over religious artifacts.

Saint John Damascene died at his monastery in approximately 749, and in 1890 he was declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Leo XIII. His feast day is December 4.

Stewardship and New Year's Resolutions

Stewardship is a commitment of mind and heart to the Lord; a way of life that needs constant renewal and transformation. This time of year has always been one of looking forward to a new year, reflecting on the changes we need to make in our lives and resolving to follow through on those changes. Perhaps those who seek to make resolutions to be better stewards might find inspiration in the following samples:



Stewardship of Prayer: Resolve to strengthen your relationship with the Lord. Notice how often you pray and what hinders you from praying. Commit to short, daily prayer times.



Stewardship of Health: Resolve to get those medical and dental checkups. Adopt healthier eating habits. Add exercise and other physical activity to your daily routine.

Stewardship of Possessions: Resolve to possess a little more “lightly” this year. Consider ways you can reduce the amount of all that stuff you own. Distinguish between those items that are necessary and those that are considered luxurious and unnecessary.

Stewardship of the Parish Family: Resolve to serve your faith community in some way this year such as at liturgy, in the parish's outreach or education and formation efforts.



Stewardship of Money: Resolve to render sacred your annual budget. Reprioritize your financial goals to ensure that the Lord comes first in your spending. Take positive steps to improve your financial health.

Stewardship of Work: Resolve to be faithful to your daily, work-related tasks and offer them up to the Lord. Cultivate your skills. Deepen your knowledge. Be mindful of how you are building the Kingdom of God.

Stewardship of Family: Resolve to set aside more time to stay connected with your family. Eat dinner together, schedule regular dates with your spouse, plan family outings, and go to Mass together.



Stewardship of Mind: Resolve to keep your mind active. Commit to being more informed on the issues of the day. Read your Bible. In the coming year of presidential elections in the United States, familiarize yourself with the Church's social teachings.



Stewardship of Neighbor: Resolve to be a person of hospitality; to make time and space for others who enter your life. Be more aware of those times when a neighbor, co-worker, fellow parishioner or stranger, needs a moment of kindness, a little attention or an affirming gesture on your part.

Stewardship of the Poor: Resolve to live with more compassion and in solidarity with those less fortunate. Remember the poor in prayer, and commit to helping relieve in some way the plight of those who are impoverished or marginalized.

The Blessed Virgin Mary: Our Model of Stewardship

The International Catholic Stewardship Council was consecrated and entrusted to the Blessed Virgin Mary by Saint John Paul II in 1998 at the ICSC international conference in Rome.

Thirty-five years prior to that consecration, Saint John XXIII, during the latter months of his papacy, entrusted the mission and members of what was to become the International Catholic Stewardship Council to the patronage of the Immaculate Conception of the blessed Virgin Mary at the request of Cardinal Joseph Ritter, Archbishop of St. Louis, Missouri. In her honor, John XXIII chose the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, celebrated by the Church on December 8, as the patronal feast of ICSC.

The Blessed Virgin Mary teaches us the meaning of discipleship and stewardship in their most profound sense by her own life witness. In their pastoral letter on Christian stewardship, the United States bishops acknowledged all of stewardship's essential attributes as being found in her life: she was called and gifted by God; she responded generously, creatively, and prudently;



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and she understood her divinely assigned role as “handmaid” in terms of service and fidelity (Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response, p.43).

Our Blessed Mother has emerged as a source of protection, refuge and comfort in her distinction as Our Lady of Guadalupe; and the rich traditions of her veneration often reflect the historical journeys, sorrow and the hopes of Catholic faithful in the entire Western Hemisphere.

God has allowed the missionary work of ICSC to be fruitful, and it constantly seeks the grace for deeper sanctification of its missionary work by prayerfully petitioning the Blessed Virgin Mary for assistance. It invokes Our Lady to show us the way to be good stewards of God’s abundant gifts, including the gift of our savior, Jesus Christ.

Advent: *Exercising Good Stewardship of Our Spiritual Lives*

When you say the word “Advent,” what immediately pops into mind? A feast of color, a traditional manger scene bathed in soft candlelight, glistening snowflakes falling on festive trees, a yearning for the One who is to come.

But sometimes, the season brings other images: crowded stores, treats that tempt us to too many calories, limitless to-do and to-buy lists. Yet in the back of our minds, we hear the call to conversion. Christ is calling us to be good stewards of all that we have and all that we are. How can we keep Advent in such a way that it is a time to focus on the fundamentals of stewardship; of spiritual growth and preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ? Here are a few suggestions, not meant to be another to-do list, but rather a way to remind ourselves daily of our call to prepare a way for the Lord in our lives.

1. Begin the season with a list to prioritize what you really want spiritually, and in relation to friends and family, from Advent. Discard all the “extras” and the fantasy of the perfect Hallmark Christmas. List clear goals that bring growth and peace and quality time.

2. Take time to read the daily readings each day of Advent. The beautiful words of Isaiah are guaranteed to



inspire, and the commitment will guarantee you a bit of quiet and reflective time.

3. Do you send Christmas cards? Even if they are the standard signature only or newsletter variety, try to personalize one a day, writing a nice note to an elderly relative or a friend you haven't seen in a long time.

4. Embrace the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This will encourage you to reflect on your life, your gifts and where you fail to utilize them for the good of others. It's a beautiful

preparation for the coming of Jesus and the beginning of a new year.

5. Pray for patience. As you drive over icy streets or navigate through a crowded store, take time to pray for those around you and for those who struggle with much less. Become aware of people around you and lift them in prayer rather than see them as obstacles to your goals.

6. In the midst of a season of abundance, do not forget the poor in your community.





A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

First Sunday of Advent **December 2/3, 2023**

The season of Advent is upon us, and in today's Gospel Jesus delivers a simple message through the pen of Saint Mark: "Be watchful! Be alert!" Christian stewards understand what Jesus meant when he said, "It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task." Good stewards realize that to each one a task is assigned by God. They have been set in a particular place and station in life, and have been gifted with unique relationships. How do we respond to the tasks or cultivate our relationships in a way that keeps us alert for the return of Christ?

Second Sunday of Advent **Weekend of December 9/10, 2023**

Today's second reading is about Christ's coming again, "The day of the Lord," Peter calls it, but that day isn't December 25th. It's that other day, that second-coming-day about which Peter is concerned. He waits with great hope and anticipation for God to remake the earth into a place of perfect justice and peace. And he sets some demanding goals for the Christian community as it awaits that final day of accounting and reconciliation: strive to be at peace, without spot or blemish. Christian stewards work for peace. As we await the coming of Christmas, what can we do to promote peace in our homes, workplaces, community and world?

Third Sunday of Advent **Weekend of December 16/17, 2023**

In today's second reading Paul concludes his letter to the Christian community at Thessalonica by providing it with actions to take as its members wait for the return of the Lord. The first action is to rejoice always and give thanks in all circumstances. This sounds easy but it's not. The two words that make this task difficult are "always" and "all". This means giving thanks and rejoicing even when our circumstances are not always moments of joy and thanksgiving, or when we are confronted with a broken world. Prayerful stewards rejoice and give thanks in all circumstances because they are people of hope. A good reflection this week would be how the season of Advent can give you reason to hope.

Fourth Sunday of Advent **Weekend of December 23/24, 2023**

In today's Gospel reading we hear proclaimed the story of the Annunciation, when the angel of the Lord announced to Mary that she would give birth to Christ through the intercession of the Holy Spirit. Mary allowed God's messenger to speak to her. She was attentive, not afraid to enter into a dialogue, then unconditionally obedient. Mary's acceptance of this mystery is a stewardship model for us. Good stewards remain open to the incursions of divine life into the normal course of their daily lives. How open are we to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our own lives? What might we do this last week of Advent to be more attentive to the Lord?

The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas Day) **Monday, December 25, 2023**

In today's Christmas Mass at dawn we hear from the Gospel reading that God has entered quietly into the world. Not into the great city of Jerusalem, but into a small village about five miles south. Not into a noble family, but to an outcast couple keeping the newborn in a manger. Not announced by royal edicts, but to common shepherds, the first human heralds of Christ's birth. As Christian stewards we simply allow Christ to live in us no matter what our circumstances happen to be. We allow Christ to share his love with us and reflect that love out to others. We now are the heralds of Christ's Incarnation. What an unimaginable gift from a generous Lord. Good stewards rejoice in this gift and give glory to God.

Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph **Weekend of December 30/31, 2023**

When Jesus is presented in the Temple, our Blessed Mother formally offers him to God's service without reservation. It is a service that Simeon prophetically foretells: a service to God that will turn the old laws and cultural norms upside down. Are we destined to hold on to old habits and customs tightly, or like Jesus, are we willing to serve the Lord and proclaim the Gospel in new and creative ways?