

# Two ways to contemplate the face of Christ this Christmas



During the Christmas season, the Church beckons us to contemplate the Christ Child – God’s own son, the one who has been born anew into the world and into our hearts, and the one for whom we wait joyfully until he comes again.

There are many ways to do this, but two are particularly fitting for the season. The first is to contemplate Christ within the Nativity scene. In [\*Admirabile Signum\*](#), Pope Francis’ new apostolic letter on the meaning and importance of the Nativity scene, Francis reminds us that the Nativity scene present during Advent and Christmas “never ceases to arouse amazement and wonder.

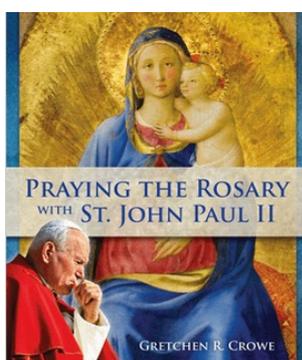
“The depiction of Jesus’ birth is itself a simple and joyful proclamation of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God,” he writes. “The Nativity scene is like a living Gospel rising up from the pages of sacred Scripture. As we contemplate the Christmas story, we are invited to set out on a spiritual journey, drawn by the humility of the God who became man in order to encounter every man and woman. We come to realize that so great is his love for us that he became one of us, so that we in turn might become one with him.”

In the last Advent before his death, Pope St. John Paul II, who in 1982 began the tradition of setting up a Nativity scene in St. Peter’s Square, spoke about their importance. Within

them, he said, “we can already find Joseph and Mary, silent witnesses of a sublime mystery. With their look of love they invite us to be vigilant and to pray to receive the divine Savior, who comes to bring the joy of Christmas to the world.”

In addition to prayer in the presence of a crèche, we also are able to effectively reflect on the mystery of Christ’s birth through the Rosary, another devotion close to John Paul’s heart.

### “Pray the Rosary with St. John Paul II”



Be drawn to holiness by meditating upon the mysteries of the Rosary with the help of Pope St. John Paul II. Each mystery in the book contains an excerpt from a talk or writing of John Paul and a short reflection on how he embodies the spiritual fruits that accompany each mystery. This full-color book also has nearly 30 photographs of John Paul, making it a beautiful gift either for yourself or for a Rosary-lover that you know. Visit [osvcatholicbookstore.com](http://osvcatholicbookstore.com).

In his apostolic letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, John Paul wrote that “with the Rosary, the Christian people *sits at the school of Mary* and is led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love” (No. 1).

By reflecting on the mysteries of the Rosary, we are able to enter into Jesus’s life through the eyes of Mary and better understand how her son can and must be the model for our lives. Like reflecting on the Nativity, praying the Rosary also enables a living Gospel to unfold before us. And with

perseverance and dedication, we can persevere in virtuous living. Prayer, especially prayer that enables us to effectively contemplate Christ, can help us “put on Christ,” which leads us to our goal of eternal life with the Father in heaven. John Paul, who was so devoted to the Rosary, is living proof of this potential.

“We have to learn to pray: as it were learning this art ever anew from the lips of the Divine Master himself, like the first disciples: ‘Lord, teach us to pray!’ (Lk 11:1),” John Paul writes in his apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (No. 32). “Prayer develops that conversation with Christ which makes us his intimate friends: ‘Abide in me and I in you’ (Jn 15:4).”

This interplay, he added, “is the very substance and soul of the Christian life, and the condition of all true pastoral life.”

“Wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, this reciprocity opens us, through Christ and in Christ, to contemplation of the Father’s face,” he continues. “Learning this Trinitarian shape of Christian prayer and living it fully, above all in the liturgy, the summit and source of the Church’s life, but also in personal experience, is the secret of a truly vital Christianity, which has no reason to fear the future, because it returns continually to the sources and finds in them new life.”

As we celebrate another Christmas season, let us rejoice in the gift of the incarnate Lord, the one who, through contemplation and prayer at the Nativity Scene and of the mysteries of the Rosary, sustains us in Gospel living and guides us to heaven.

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**Pray at the Nativity scene with St. John Paul II**

*The following prayer was included in Pope John Paul II's homily for Christmas Midnight Mass on Dec. 24, 2002:*

“Lord Jesus, together with the shepherds  
we draw near to your Crib.

We contemplate you, wrapped in swaddling cloths  
and lying in the manger.

O Babe of Bethlehem,  
we adore you in silence with Mary,  
your ever-Virgin Mother.

To you be glory and praise for ever,  
Divine Saviour of the World! Amen.”