

Advent Devotions



Advent & Christmas Novenas

Golden Octave

Litany of the Incarnate Word

TABLE OF CONTENTS	
Page	Description
1	Advent Novena
2	The Golden Octave - Preparatory Christmas Devotions
3	Christmas Novena
10	Litany of the Incarnate Word

Caption. The cover page depicts the Jesse Tree, which was a very popular representation of the genealogy of Jesus Christ in the Middle Ages. As we are all descended from Adam and Eve (Jesus, through His mother), the point of the Tree is not to prove that origin for the Son of Man; rather, it is to show the intervening descent through important kings and prophets of the Old Testament. They are made important by God’s own decree. Hence Christ becomes the culmination of the patriarchs, prophets, kings and judges of the One True Faith. In various ways, they are types of Him and they prepare for His First Coming. The Season of Advent is connected to this Tree because Advent prepares us for the Nativity of Christ and therefore focuses on the dispensation of God the Father through the Old Testament.

Inspiration for the Jesse Tree came from a passage from the Book of Isaias: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root. . . . In that day, the root of Jesse, who standeth for an ensign of the people, him the Gentiles shall beseech, and his sepulchre shall be glorious” (Isaias 11. 1, 10). In the Latin text of the Vulgate, *flower* is rendered as “*Virga*”, which also means *twig*. It is a reference to Christ as the completion of the genealogy but the Latin word would also bring to mind *Virgo*, Virgin. Hence it also points to the purity of the Messiah.

In the New Testament, the lineage of Jesus is traced by two of the evangelists; namely, St. Matthew and St. Luke. The first provides it in descending order; the second, in ascending order.

The two lists cause confusion because different names are used for the same people. However, both mention Jesse as the father of King David, giving Jesus royal descent. Both also show descent from Abraham. St. Matthew's genealogy puts some emphasis on Abraham; on Jesse and his son David the King and his son Solomon the King; Josias and Jechonias at the time of the transmigration to Babylon; and Jacob and his son Joseph, the husband of our Lady.

The descent to Jesus is not natural, as Joseph was not His natural father. However, St. Joseph had the supreme honour of representing God the Heavenly Father on earth because he raised and protected God Himself and because he was the true husband of God's own mother. This is why we venerate St. Joseph as the Prince of Patriarchs. The descent from Joseph to Jesus is therefore spiritual; it is divine. This makes it more effective, not less so.

Use of the Image of the Jesse Tree

In the pictorial arts, the branches of the Jesse Tree are used to show descent in accordance with Isaias' prophecy about the coming of the Christ. Some depictions attempt to show all the descendants from Abraham or even Adam but most, by way of abbreviation, show important ancestors of St. Joseph plus a few 'place-sitters' to stand for the others. The twelfth-century monk Hervæus explained the mediæval understanding of the image in this way: "The Patriarch Jesse belonged to the royal family. That is why the root of Jesse signifies the lineage of kings. As for the rod, it symbolises Mary, while the flower figures Jesus Christ". Heredity was important in the mediæval period—in the Ages of Faith. The reason is that transfer of property, rulership and prerogatives by inheritance invites God Himself to stipulate ownership for the reward or just punishment of the people. Therefore, heredity was seen as the normal means for enabling divine governance and dignity.

Advent Nobena



Hail and blessed be the hour and moment
in which the Son of God was born
of the most pure virgin Mary,
at midnight, in Bethlehem, in piercing cold.
In that hour, vouchsafe, O my God!,
to hear my prayer and grant my desires,
through the merits of Our Saviour Jesus Christ,
and of His Blessed Mother. Amen.

The Golden Octave

PREPARATORY CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONS

The Golden Octave is a period of eight days which precedes Christmas Day; therefore, it begins on 17th December and ends on 24th December. It is enveloped by a Christmas Novena which begins on 16th December in the evening and ends on Christmas Eve. Advent prepares us for Christmas in general but also has its own special character as a Season, for it draws emphasis to the First Person of the Blessed Trinity and the Old Testament prophets. The Golden Octave is a shorter and more intense period of preparation which points univocally to the Birth of Jesus Christ. This structure of building tension by temporal shortening is paralleled by the division of Lent into an earlier and longer period (Quadragesima) and a shorter and later one (Passiontide).

The Golden Octave is not merely customary but has force in the Sacred Liturgy. From the beginning of Advent, ferial days are promoted from their normal fourth class to third. By excluding fourth-class feasts and commemorative Requiem Masses and also Votive Masses, the liturgy turns our attention more to penitence and waiting. With the Golden Octave, the ferias are promoted again to 'greater ferias', now taking the second class. It means that only the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle can be celebrated in this period and all other Masses are offered in purple.

Each ancient O Antiphon is traditionally prayed on a day in the Golden Octave except its last day, the Vigil of Christmas, on which devotions concentrate on our Lady as the very portal of God into our world: Jesus comes to us through our Lady, and we approach Him through her, the Mediatrix of All Graces.

Christmas Novena

The traditional Christmas Novena begins on 16th December. Following is a form for it which includes the wonderful *O Antiphons* and adds one for St. Thomas the Apostle (21st December) and one for our Lady (Christmas Eve). These Antiphons and other Novena Prayers should be said each evening from 16th to 24th December inclusive.

The opening prayers are said each evening at or after 6.00 p.m. They are followed by the assigned *O Antiphon* for the day and then five offerings to honour the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, our Lady and St. Joseph, and the three persons of the Holy Family. Jesus is the One who connects these two trinities. Notice that each offering addresses the “Eternal Father” and closes with a Glory that mentions the Holy Ghost last: so the Father and Holy Ghost envelop the references to each person of the Holy Family. The second offering refers to the sacrifices of our Lady and St. Joseph; the last three, to those of Jesus. After the Five Offerings, all of which are rendered each evening in the Novena, there are Closing Prayers to be said.

INTRODUCTORY PRAYERS

Signum Crucis:

In the Name of the ✠ Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Invitatory:

✠. Incline ✠ unto mine aid, O God.

℟. O Lord, make haste to help me.

Let us pray.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who, for our sake, didst vouchsafe to descend from Thy throne of glory in Heaven to this vale of tears; Who wast conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary and wast made Man: make, we beseech Thee, our hearts a fit habitation for Thyself. Beautify and fill them with

all spiritual graces, and possess them wholly by Thy power. Give us grace to prepare for Thy Coming with deep humility, to receive Thee with burning love, and to hold Thee with a firm faith; that we may never leave Thee nor forsake Thee; Who livest and reignest, forever and ever. Amen.

Here say each day the assigned O Antiphon, and then say each day all the Five Offerings and Closing Prayers:

16th December

O WISDOM, which camest out of the mouth of the Most High, and reachest from one end to another, mightily and sweetly ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of prudence.

17th December

O ADONAI (Lord) and Leader of the House of Israel, who appearedst in the bush to Moses in a flame of fire, and gavest him the Law in Sinai: Come and redeem us, with an outstretched arm.

18th December

O ROOT OF JESSE, which standest for an ensign of the people, at whom Kings shall shut their mouths: Come and deliver us, and tarry not.

19th December

O KEY OF DAVID, and the Sceptre of the house of Israel, that openest and no man shutteth, and shuttest and no man openeth: Come and bring the prisoner out of the prisonhouse, and him that sitteth in darkness and the shadow of death.

20th December

O DAYSPRING, Brightness of the Light Everlasting, and Sun of Righteousness: Come and enlighten him that sitteth in darkness and the shadow of death.

21st December

O THOMAS DIDYMUS, to thee it was vouchsafed to touch Christ risen: Whom we petition, by His mercy from on high, to aid us in our miseries, lest we be doomed with the lost when the Judge appeareth.

22nd December

O KING OF THE NATIONS, and their Desire, the Cornerstone, who makest both one: Come and save mankind, whom Thou formedst of clay.

23rd December

O EMMANUEL, our King and Lawgiver, the Desire of all nations, and their Salvation: Come and save us, O Lord our God.

24th December

O VIRGIN OF VIRGINS, how shall this be? For neither before thee was any like thee, nor shall there be after. Daughters of Jerusalem, why marvel ye at me? The thing which ye behold is a divine mystery.

FIVE OFFERINGS

*Each day, make each of the following five offerings,
each of which ends in a Glory:*

I

Offering: Eternal Father, I offer to Thine honour and glory and for mine own salvation and for the salvation of all the world the mystery of the birth of our divine Saviour.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

II

Offering: Eternal Father, I offer to Thine honour and glory and for mine eternal salvation the sufferings of the most holy Virgin and of St. Joseph in that long and weary journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. I offer Thee their anxiety of heart when they found no place wherein to shelter themselves, when the Saviour of the world was to be born. Glory.

III

Offering: Eternal Father, I offer to Thine honour and glory and for mine eternal salvation the stable where Jesus was born, the hard straw which served Him for a bed, the cold He suffered, the swaddling clothes which bound Him, the tears He shed, and His tender infant cries. Glory.

IV

Offering: Eternal Father, I offer to Thine honour and glory and for mine eternal salvation the pain which the holy Child Jesus felt in His tender infant body when He submitted it to the keen knife of circumcision; I offer Thee that Precious Blood which then first He shed for the salvation of the whole race of man. Glory.

V

Offering: Eternal Father, I offer to Thine honour and glory and for mine eternal salvation the humility, mortification, patience, charity and all the virtues of the Child Jesus: and I thank Thee, and I love Thee, and I bless Thee without end for this ineffable Mystery of the Incarnation of the Divine Word. Glory.

CLOSING PRAYERS

- ∇. [bowing if kneeling or genuflecting if standing:]
The Word was made flesh.
- ⱼ. [unbowing or rising:] And dwelt among us.

Let us pray.

O God, Whose only-begotten Son was made manifest to us in the substance of our flesh: grant, we beseech Thee, that through Him, our souls may be inwardly renewed, whom our eyes have seen externally as like unto ourselves, Who livest and reignest with Thee, forever and ever. *Amen.*

Now say one *Pater* and the following close: Our Father

Let us pray.

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which Thy Son, Jesus Christ, came to visit us in great humility; that in the Last Day, when He shall come again in His glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through the same Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

The Ancient O Antiphons

Following are the original seven ancient O Antiphons. Say one of these each morning on the day appointed hereunder. They form an Octave of preparation for Christmas. Each invokes Christ by one of His divine titles, and this is followed by a description of the Messiah or one of His attributes, and a plea that He come to enlighten and deliver us.

17th December

(Ecclesiasticus 24. 5; Wisdom 8. 1)

O WISDOM, Who didst come out of the mouth of the Most High, reaching from end to end and ordering all things mightily and sweetly: come and teach us the way of prudence.

18th December

(Exodus 3. 2; 20. 1)

O ADONAI, and Leader of the House of Israel, Who didst appear to Moses in the flame of the burning bush, and didst give unto Him the Law on Sinai: come, and with an outstretched arm, redeem us.

19th December

(Isaias 11. 10)

O ROOT OF JESSE, Who dost stand for an ensign of the people, before Whom kings shall keep silence, and unto Whom the Gentiles shall make their supplication: come to deliver us, and tarry not.

20th December

(Isaias 22. 22; Apocalypse 3. 7; St. Luke 1. 79)

O KEY OF DAVID, and Sceptre of the House of Israel, Who dost open and no man doth shut, Who dost shut and no man doth open: come and bring forth from his prison-house the captive that sitteth in darkness and in the shadow of death.

21st December

(Wisdom 7. 26; Malachias 4. 2; Psalm 106. 10)

O DAWN OF THE EAST, Brightness of the Light Eternal and Sun of Justice: come and enlighten them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

22nd December

(Aggeus 2. 8; Ephesians 2. 14, 20)

O KING OF THE GENTILES and the Desired of them, Thou Cornerstone that dost make both one: come and deliver man, whom Thou didst form out of the dust of the earth.

23rd December

(Isaias 7. 14; 33. 22)

O EMMANUEL, our King and Lawgiver, the Expected of the Nations and their Saviour: come to save us, O Lord our God.

LITANY OF THE INCARNATE WORD

(Abridged from the *Paradisus Animæ*)

This Litany draws attention to the Incarnation of Christ, which is appropriate during the Golden Octave of anticipation for Christmas, for the same Incarnation was first made manifest to us at His holy Nativity at Bethlehem.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

God the Father of Heaven,

have mercy on us.

God the Son, Redeemer of the world,

have mercy on us.

God the Holy Ghost,

have mercy on us.

Holy Trinity, One God,

&c.

Word made flesh,

Word full of grace and truth,

God, by Whom all things were made,

Lord God of Israel, blessed for evermore,

Only-begotten Son of God,

Saviour, Christ and Lord,

Great God, Son of the Most High,

God with us, Emmanuel,

Only-begotten Son, Who art in the bosom of the Father,

Well-beloved Son of God, in Whom the Father is well pleased,

Wisdom established from all eternity,

Image of the Eternal Father,

Whose Name is above every name,

Who upholdest all things by the word of Thy power,

Beginning of the Creation of God,

First-born of every creature,

First-born among many brethren,

Heir of all things,

Flower of the field and lily of the valley,

Bud of justice,

Angel of the Lord,
Angel of the Testament,
Star arisen out of Jacob,
Lion of the Tribe of Judah,
Rod of Jesse,
Son of David,
Son of Man,
Jesus of Nazareth,
Meek and humble of heart,
Good Shepherd, Who givest Thy life for Thy sheep,
Shepherd and Bishop of our souls,
Saint of saints,
Prince of pastors,
Great Prophet, mighty in word and work,
Who wast sent to preach the Gospel to the poor,
The Lord our Lawgiver,
Light of the world,
True Light which enlightenest every man
 that cometh into the world,
Key of David,
Ark of the covenant,
Living stone, elect of God,
Stone that art become the head of the corner,
Stone of foundation laid in the midst of Sion,
Prince of the kings of the earth,
Master and Lord,
King of kings and Lord of lords,
Man of sorrows, acquainted with infirmity,
Who hast truly borne our infirmities,
By whose bruises we are healed,
Lamb without blemish,
Lamb slain from the beginning of the world,
Our Prince and Saviour,
Our Lord and our God,
Salvation of God sent to the Gentiles,
The Propitiation for our sins,

The Apostle and High Priest of our confession,
The One Mediator between man and his Heavenly Father,
Mediator of the New Testament,
Author and Finisher of faith,
First-begotten of the dead,
The Resurrection and the Life,
The Pasch and nourishment of our souls,
Who hast the keys of death and Hell,
Our Advocate with the Father,
The Temple and the Lamp of the holy city,
Hope of mortals,
Tree of life,
Light of life,
Fountain of life,
The beginning and the End,
Judge of the living and the dead,
God blessed for ever.

Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world,
spare us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world,
graciously hear us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world,
grant us Thy peace.

Christ, hear us. *Christ, graciously hear us.*

Let us pray.

O God, Who, by Thy co-eternal Wisdom, didst make man when he was not, and mercifully restored him when he was lost; grant, we beseech Thee, that, by the inspiration of the same Wisdom, we may both love Thee with our whole soul and fly to Thee with our whole heart. Through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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