

Calendar Advisory: Christmas 2021 and Solemnity of Mary 2022

This year, the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas) falls on a Saturday and is immediately followed on Sunday by the Feast of the Holy Family. In cases of consecutive feast days, there are often questions regarding which Mass is to be celebrated on Saturday evening and whether Evening Prayer II of the current day or Evening Prayer I of the following day is prayed at the *Liturgy of the Hours*. The May-June 2016 *Newsletter* presents a more thorough examination of these issues in “The Liturgical Celebration of Consecutive Feast Days (and Nights).”

What day is celebrated is determined by two considerations: the rank of each celebration on the Table of Liturgical Days and whether each celebration is a holy day of obligation. In some cases, e.g., when the Assumption falls on a Saturday, the Mass of the Sunday in Ordinary Time is generally anticipated on Saturday evening because precedence is given to the “feast of precept” – even though the Assumption occupies a higher place on the Table of Liturgical Days.

In the case of Christmas and Holy Family, both are days of precept (the latter because it falls on a Sunday), but Christmas occupies a higher place on the Table of Liturgical Days. Therefore, on the evening of Saturday, December 25, the Nativity Mass during the Day is celebrated with its accompanying readings from the Lectionary, and Evening Prayer II is prayed.

On days such as these, there are also questions regarding the fulfillment of the obligation to attend Mass. This was examined in “The Mass Obligation of the Faithful on Consecutive Feast Days” from the February 2017 *Newsletter*. In short, the prevailing view of many canon lawyers is that each obligation (in this case, one for Christmas and another for Holy Family) must be fulfilled with a separate Mass. The fulfillment of the Mass obligation does not depend upon the Mass prayers and readings but rather on the time of day at which one attends Mass. According to canon 1248 §1, “A person who assists at a Mass celebrated anywhere in a Catholic rite either on the feast day itself or in the evening of the preceding day satisfies the obligation of participating in the Mass.” Evening is commonly understood to begin at 4:00 PM, the earliest time permitted for anticipated Masses by Venerable Pope Pius XII in his 1953 Apostolic Constitution *Christus Dominus*. The following chart may be helpful:

Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)	Holy Family
Obligation may be fulfilled from the evening of Friday, December 24 through Saturday, December 25.	Obligation may be fulfilled from the evening of Saturday, December 25 through Sunday, December 26.
For example, one may attend: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vigil Mass of the Nativity • Mass during the Night (celebrated at any time) • Morning/afternoon/evening Masses on December 25 	For example, one may attend: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afternoon/evening Masses on December 25 (even though the Mass texts will be for the Nativity) • Morning/afternoon/evening Masses on December 26

The situation with the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God on Saturday, January 1, 2022 is more straightforward. In the United States, the obligation to attend Mass on the Solemnity of Mary is abrogated when this celebration occurs on a Monday or a Saturday. In this case, because the Solemnity occurs on a Saturday, the Vigil Mass of the Epiphany is celebrated and Evening Prayer I of the Epiphany is prayed at the *Liturgy of the Hours*. Even if both solemnities were holy days of obligation, the Vigil Mass and Evening Prayer I of Epiphany would still be celebrated on the evening of Saturday, January 1. While one is not required to anticipate a Mass on the preceding evening of a Sunday or feast of precept, the Vigil Mass of the Epiphany is not an anticipated Mass but a Vigil. According to the *Universal Norms of the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*, “Some Solemnities are also endowed with their own Vigil Mass, which is to be used on the evening of the preceding day, if an evening Mass is celebrated” (no. 11).