One evening this past summer, a long lost friend and I were reminiscing about Christmas Day and how we had celebrated it. She told me of one Christmas past when her family was completely snowed in and it was impossible to get to Mass. “We had a nice Christmas that year, but it just was not the same because we missed Christmas Masses; it was somehow empty.” I agreed, saying that sometimes the unexpected can drastically alter our well made plans.

Tonight we marvel at the grace of this Most Holy Solemnity. With the same excitement of children on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning, we celebrate and welcome once again the “Christ event,” the birth of Jesus. God is so much in love with creation that the Son of God became incarnate, fully human and fully divine, made fully present to us, on that first Christmas long ago, now and forever.
This is such a beautiful time of year. All of the traditional decorations are up: trees, tinsel, Christmas crèches, pine boughs, wrapped presents under the family tree, and perhaps the aromas of Christmas dinner preparations wafting through the house. For many, it warms the heart and soul. Amid the festivities, we can often lose sight of the infant lying in the manger.

Our exterior decorations are up, but what of our interior decorations? It is easy to become overwhelmed by plans, guests, and frustrations.

Pope Francis (whom I have come to love more and more as he shapes the Church… and perhaps even the Curia…) suggests that we imagine ourselves as a quiet pool of water shining like a mirror; nothing disturbing its surface with ripples or waves.
Make full use of Mother Church’s Christmas liturgies to take a step away from holiday frustrations and calm yourself. Take refuge in the birth of the Christ Child, and in the real presence of Jesus in the word you hear, and in the consecrated bread you will hold in your hands. Allow the peace of Christ to enter once again into your life, calming all of your anxieties, filling you with all that is good.

**Christmas is not simply a one-day event.** It is an entire Church season. As Christmas day comes to a close, someone is always bound to say, “Well, only 12 more months to Christmas!” Liturgically, this year’s Christmas Season goes until January 11. Take advantage of this time to continue to celebrate. If the festivities of Christmas did not work out the way you hoped, you have ample time to celebrate. If despite the efforts, the day wasn’t as perfect as you may have hoped for, make the time to calm yourself and celebrate.

Some of our annual guests are often difficult to bear. The holiday season can wear us down. Use this wonderful season to refresh yourself.
Keep in mind the still pool of water that Pope Francis mentioned. If you have a Christmas crèche set up in your home, use it as a spiritual oasis. Every time you pass by it, use those seconds or minutes for a sacred pause. Look at the Christ Child; the Holy Family; the colorful characters that make up the scene. Return to the true meaning of Christmas. Think of the shepherds… The first were the lowly and overlooked. Their presence made the powerful uneasy. They were the first because they were among the last, the outcast. They were the first witnesses to the birth of Christ because they were awake, keeping watch in the night, guarding their flocks. We are pilgrims, pilgrims who are bound by duty to keep watch and the shepherds did just that. Pope Francis quoted St. Paul that Christ “who was rich became poor so that we in our poverty could become rich” in and through Him.

Together with them, let us pause before the Child, let us pause in silence. Together with them, let us thank the Lord for having given Jesus to us, and with them let us raise from the depths of our hearts the praises of his fidelity: We bless you, Lord God most high, who lowered yourself
for our sake. Although you are immense, you made yourself small; although you are rich …you made yourself poor; you are all-powerful and you made yourself vulnerable.

Commercial television and the constant scream of ads attempt to tell us what we need at this time of year. Mother Church quietly whispers in our ears what is needed and wanting in our lives. Listen for the whisper of the Holy Spirit.

Sadly, the Christmas season can be a time of dread for many people. Poverty or the lack of good traditions in their lives make this time of year unbearable. Pray for those who find themselves lost in broken heartedness, loneliness, mental illnesses, or addictions. The real presence of Jesus is often misunderstood. Those who live in fear or dread of past deeds often feel the most alienated from God when, in fact, God remains close to them. It is right that we sing “silent night, holy night” despite the fact that “all is [not] calm, all is [not] bright.” But because we know what it means not to be calm and when life is not
bright we rely on the gift of Christ among us as Emmanuel who will never leave us, ever.

During these days, try to allow the loving hands of our creator to embrace you. As the Christ Child was wrapped in swaddling clothes, may you be wrapped in God’s grace. Much in modern North American culture carries us further from the Good News of the Gospel. Focus on the true meaning of Christmas and return to the gospel and good, joyful living.

As we hear of the coming of our savior, as we hold Jesus in our hands, welcome the indwelling presence of God to wrap you in love, peace, and all that is good.