

Growing Christians

*Celebrating Saints
& Holy Days at Home*

About the cover: The home altar pictured on the cover was created by the Liles family as part of their at-home celebration of the Christian year. *Photo by Allison Sandlin Liles.*

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Introduction

The Grow Christians community entered my life at the best possible time. I had transitioned from working full-time to part-time, taking on the role of lead parent in our household. No longer working in parish ministry, I found myself approaching our two young children as my new congregation. And I was failing. I couldn't quite find age-appropriate language to teach them about sacraments or generate excitement around celebrating feast days.

As I shared these frustrations with my son's godmother, I learned Forward Movement had an online space for parents like me—parents who wanted to nurture their children's faith formation but weren't quite sure how. In addition to teaching about our faith, early authors of GrowChristians.org paired recipes and simple crafts with liturgical feasts and lesser saints. These posts provided valuable resources to introduce holy days to my young, curious children in language they could understand. After reading encouraging posts from Derek Olsen and Nurya Love Parish, I brought my kids with me to Ash Wednesday and Good Friday services that year. I learned about books and Bibles to share with my children and godchildren and better ways to welcome and affirm other people's children while worshiping at church.

After I joined the Grow Christians community, a transition happened in our household: faith formation now primarily happened at home with Sunday school classes serving as an

additional resource rather than vice versa. Every day brought new age-appropriate opportunities for worship, prayer, and formation, rather than relegating them to Sunday-only activities.

This book gathers the best of our reflections from Growing Christians on major feasts, holy days, and fasts. You can find a list of these days from the Episcopal Calendar of the Church Year found in *The Book of Common Prayer* on pages 15-33. While the church year begins on the First Sunday of Advent, the entries in this book follow the calendar year to make it easier for all households to participate and engage. Some of the feasts will be familiar to you—Easter Day, Pentecost, and Christmas Day, for example. Also included are feasts of apostles and evangelists who are lesser-known, such as Saint Matthias and Saint James of Jerusalem.

Each entry includes the appointed psalms and lessons for the day, and sometimes even with several options! On principal feast days such as Christmas Day, you will see readings listed for Year A, B, and C. These letters refer to the Episcopal Church's three-year Revised Common Lectionary Cycle. On the other feast days, the readings are the same, regardless of the years, so you'll see only one set of scripture citations. We encourage you to explore the appointed readings, individually and as a household. The practice will begin to set a rhythm for engaging with scripture.

Following the readings are reflections by a diverse group of authors: moms and dads, godparents and grandparents, friends

and youth group leaders, all bound by their commitment to helping form young people in the faith. These writers come from across the church and are both ordained and lay, from households that take a variety of shapes. The reflections share authentic stories of successes and failures, of the struggle and triumph in loving children and modeling for them the love of God.

Each day also includes a response activity to do with children. Many of these activities will appeal to young children as well as teenagers. However, I invite you to adapt the reflections and responses to fit your needs. The day offers a section to learn more, to dive deeper into the history and context of the day. We have created a page on our website with additional resources to support your activities. Visit GrowChristians.org/holydays to learn more.

And finally, each day concludes with a prayer. Most of these prayers are from the latest iteration of Lesser Feasts and Fasts, but as noted, some are from *The Book of Common Prayer*. Prayer is a central component of our lives of faith and a wonderful habit to cultivate within your household.

Welcome to our Grow Christians community. Please join us online by following Grow Christians on Facebook or subscribing to receive posts by email at GrowChristians.org. My hope is that this community and the resources and wisdom it offers will be as transformational for you and your household as it has been for mine.

Allison Sandlin Liles, Editor

Calendar of Holy Days and Major Feasts and Fasts

January

- 1 The Holy Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ
- 6 The Epiphany of Our Lord Jesus Christ
- 18 The Confession of Saint Peter the Apostle
- 25 The Conversion of Saint Paul the Apostle

February

- 2 The Presentation of
Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple
Ash Wednesday *
- 24 Saint Matthias the Apostle

March

- 19 Saint Joseph
- 25 The Annunciation of Our Lord Jesus Christ
to the Blessed Virgin Mary

April

- Palm Sunday *
- Maundy Thursday *
- Good Friday *
- Holy Saturday *
- Easter Day *
- 25 Saint Mark the Evangelist

May

- 1 Saint Philip and Saint James, Apostles
Ascension Day *
Day of Pentecost *
- 31 The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

June

- Trinity Sunday *
- 11 Saint Barnabas the Apostle
- 24 The Nativity of Saint John the Baptist
- 29 Saint Peter and Saint Paul, Apostles

July

- 4 Independence Day (USA)
- 22 Saint Mary Magdalene
- 25 Saint James the Apostle

August

- 6 The Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus Christ
- 15 Saint Mary the Virgin,
Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ
- 24 Saint Bartholomew the Apostle

September

- 14 Holy Cross Day
- 21 Saint Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist
- 29 Saint Michael and All Angels

October

- 18 Saint Luke the Evangelist
- 23 Saint James of Jerusalem,
Brother of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and Martyr
- 28 Saint Simon and Saint Jude, Apostles

November

- 1 All Saints
Thanksgiving Day (USA) *
- 30 Saint Andrew the Apostle

December

- 21 Saint Thomas the Apostle
- 25 The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ
- 26 Saint Stephen, Deacon and Martyr
- 27 Saint John, Apostle and Evangelist
- 28 The Holy Innocents

**These dates change each year. Check your calendar to determine the date.*

JANUARY 1

The Holy Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Read

Psalm 8 | Numbers 6:22-27 | Galatians 4:4-7 *or*
Philippians 2:5-11 | Luke 2:15-21

Reflect

Today, eight days into the Christmas season, the Episcopal Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Name. We celebrate this feast day on January 1 each year because it's the day when Jesus was named by his parents and circumcised. In the gospel appointed for today, we learn "eight days (after his birth) had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb." This sentence informs us that Mary and Joseph were devout Jews, as it was the Law of Moses requiring all newborn boys to be circumcised when they were eight days old (Leviticus 12:3).

Author

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Liles is a wife,
mother, peacemaker,
and priest learning
how to navigate life
in the suburban
wilds of Dallas.

For centuries this feast day was called the Feast of the Circumcision. Our 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* adjusted the

name, emphasizing the naming of Jesus over the circumcising of Jesus. It was customary at the time of circumcision for family and friends to witness parents publicly name the child. This is a tradition that we as modern-day Episcopalians have retained. Our liturgy of baptism begins with parents and godparents presenting the person to be baptized by naming them aloud.

Jesus is a name our children know well. It's the name toddlers confidently shout whenever they are asked a question during children's chapel. It's the baby's name lying in the manger who children crowd around to glimpse during nativity pageants. It's a name our children already know, but today we have the opportunity to teach them more about it.

Jesus is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name Joshua, or *Yehoshuah*. When the angel Gabriel tells Joseph to name the child in Mary's womb *Yeshua*, Joseph would have known it meant "God saves" or "deliverer." It's a heavy name for a young child to carry around, and I wonder how Jesus felt about it.

But Jesus isn't the only name for God's son in the Bible. We're offered so many more throughout the Old and New Testaments.

The Vine

The Messiah

The Good Shepherd

Living Water

The Word

The Bread of Life

Prince of Peace

With all the names we have for God's Son, Jesus remains the most important. Jesus is the salvation of the world, just as his name implies. When we celebrate the Holy Name of Jesus, we are celebrating the one through whom and in whom the Lord helps and saves his people. And as Jesus' disciples, we minister in his holy name to the world around us.

Respond

Spend some time today talking through the many holy names for Jesus with the children in your life. My children engage conversations more fully if their hands are busy, so we made ornaments with the names of Jesus. My church created these ornaments by coloring a printable template (thecraftyclassroom.com), then slathering them with Mod Podge during an intergenerational Advent party. The children immediately recognized some of the names for Jesus, but others were unfamiliar to them like Rose of Sharon and Shiloh. If those names are new to you as well, never fear! With the help of Oremus Bible Browser's search feature (bible.oremus.org), you can enter each specific name and find where it appears in the Bible.

Learn More

The designation of this day as the Feast of the Holy Name was new to the 1979 revision of *The Book of Common Prayer*. Previous Anglican Prayer Books called it the Feast of the Circumcision. January 1 is, of course, the eighth day after Christmas Day, and the Gospel according to Luke records that eight days after his birth the child was circumcised and given the name Jesus.

The liturgical commemoration of the Circumcision is of Gallican origin, and a Council of Tours in 567 enacted that the day was to be kept as a fast day to counteract pagan festivities connected with the beginning of the new year. In the Roman tradition, January 1 was observed as the octave day of Christmas, and it was particularly devoted to the Virgin Mary.

The early preachers of the gospel lay stress on the name as showing that Jesus was a man of flesh and blood, though also the Son of God, who died a human death, and whom God raised from death (Acts 2:32; 4:12). The name “Jesus” was given to him, as the angel explained to Joseph, because he would “save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21) as the name means “Savior” or “Deliverer” in Hebrew.

Then, as now, people longed to be freed from evils: political, social, and spiritual. The name of Jesus calls to mind the true freedom that is ours through Jesus Christ.

Pray

Eternal Father, you gave to your incarnate Son the holy name of Jesus to be the sign of our salvation: Plant in every heart, we pray, the love of him who is the Savior of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*