



There are traditions of the Church which, the older they are, the more strikingly relevant they become. One of them — little known today even among many practicing Catholics — is the celebration of **three distinct Holy Masses on Christmas Day** according to the **traditional Liturgy**. This is neither devotional repetition nor ritual excess: it is **living catechesis**, true **theology made flesh in worship**, leading us step by step into the unfathomable mystery of the Incarnation.

In a world that reduces Christmas to a feeling, a family meal, or festive decoration, the Church responds with depth: **three Masses, three moments of the day, three perspectives on the same eternal Mystery**. And each has something decisive to say to the modern man.

This article aims to help you **understand, love, and live** this liturgical richness — from its historical origins to its theological meaning, and above all through a **practical pastoral guide**, so that it does not remain mere knowledge but transforms the way you live Christmas.

1. An ancient tradition: why three Masses on Christmas?

The custom of celebrating **three Masses on December 25th** appears in Rome as early as the 5th and 6th centuries and becomes firmly established in the traditional Roman Liturgy. It did not arise by chance or clerical convenience, but from a profound spiritual intuition: **the mystery of Christ cannot be exhausted by a single viewpoint**.

The Church, Mother and Teacher, wished the faithful to contemplate Christmas from **three different heights**, like one walking around a sacred mountain to admire it from every angle:

1. **The Mass at Night (Missa in Nocte)**
2. **The Mass at Dawn (Missa in Aurora)**
3. **The Mass during the Day (Missa in Die)**

Each has its own **proper texts** (prayers, readings, antiphons), showing clearly that these are not “the same Mass repeated,” but **three celebrations with distinct identities**.



2. The Mass at Night: God enters the darkness of the world

a) The moment: the night

The **Midnight Mass** is not scheduled at that hour by mere tradition. Night, in Scripture, symbolizes the **world wounded by sin**, ignorance, fear, and silent waiting.

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light”
(Isaiah 9:2)

Christ does not choose to be born in the comfort of daylight, but **in the night**, because He comes precisely to save what lies in darkness.

b) The mystery contemplated

This Mass contemplates **the temporal birth of the Son of God**: the eternal God enters history, assumes flesh, embraces poverty, silence, and fragility.

The Gospel according to Saint Luke presents the Child wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. There is no human grandeur, yet an infinite greatness lies hidden.

c) A message for today

In a world marked by confusion, anxiety, and loss of meaning, the Mass at Night proclaims a consoling truth:

☐ **God does not flee from our nights: He is born within them.**

3. The Mass at Dawn: Christ is born in the awakening heart

a) The moment: the break of day

The second Mass is celebrated **at dawn**, when night begins to recede and light gently gains ground.



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It is not yet full day, but a **threshold moment**, symbol of the soul beginning to open itself to God.

b) The mystery contemplated

Here the Liturgy emphasizes **the birth of Christ in souls**. The shepherds, after hearing the announcement, **go, see, and believe**. The interior journey has begun.

It is the Mass of **personal encounter**, of faith moving from hearing to loving recognition.

c) A message for today

This Mass speaks directly to the ordinary Christian:

□ **Christ does not wish to be born only in Bethlehem, but within your heart.**

It is not enough to know that Jesus was born “once”; He must **be born today in your life**, in your decisions, in your way of loving, forgiving, and working.

4. The Mass of the Day: the eternal Word, Light of the world

a) The moment: full daylight

The third Mass is celebrated in full daylight, when everything is visible and reality stands without shadows.

b) The mystery contemplated

Here the Liturgy reaches its **highest theological depth**. The Gospel does not recount the manger, but the **Prologue of Saint John**:

“*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*” (John 1:1)



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The Church lifts our gaze:

not only to the Child who is born, but to the **eternal Son begotten of the Father before all ages.**

Christmas is not merely a historical event; it is an **eternal Mystery.**

c) A message for today

In a culture that reduces Jesus to a sympathetic figure or a moral teacher, this Mass boldly proclaims:

□ **The Child of Bethlehem is true God from true God.**

5. One Christmas, three births

Liturgical tradition summarizes these three Masses as the contemplation of **three births of Christ:**

1. **The eternal birth** of the Son in the bosom of the Father (Mass of the Day)
2. **The temporal birth** in Bethlehem (Mass at Night)
3. **The spiritual birth** in the souls of believers (Mass at Dawn)

They are not three Christs, but **one Christ contemplated in His fullness.**

6. A practical theological and pastoral guide for living this tradition today

Even though few faithful today can attend all three Masses, **everyone can live their meaning spiritually.** Here is a clear and realistic guide.

a) Interior preparation

- Live Advent with silence and sacramental confession
- Arrive at Christmas with a purified soul, not merely a decorated home



b) During Christmas

- **Night:** dedicate time to silent prayer, thanking God for entering your darkness
- **Dawn:** explicitly ask that Christ be born in your heart and transform your concrete life
- **Day:** consciously profess the Creed, especially faith in Christ's divinity

c) In daily life

- Defend Christmas as a Christian mystery, not merely a cultural event
- Recover traditional practices: the Nativity scene, family prayer, reading the Gospel at home
- Live humbly, remembering that God chose smallness

7. A Christmas that transforms

The traditional Liturgy is not nostalgia for the past; it is **prophecy for the present**. The three Masses of Christmas teach us that:

- God enters history
- God transforms the heart
- God reigns eternally

In a single day, the Church leads us **from the manger to eternity**, from the silence of the night to the full light of the Word.

Rediscovering this tradition is not a spiritual luxury; it is an **urgent necessity** if we are to live an authentic, profound, and truly Christian Christmas.

Because in the end, the great question of Christmas is not whether we celebrate it well... but **whether we truly allow Christ to be born within us**.