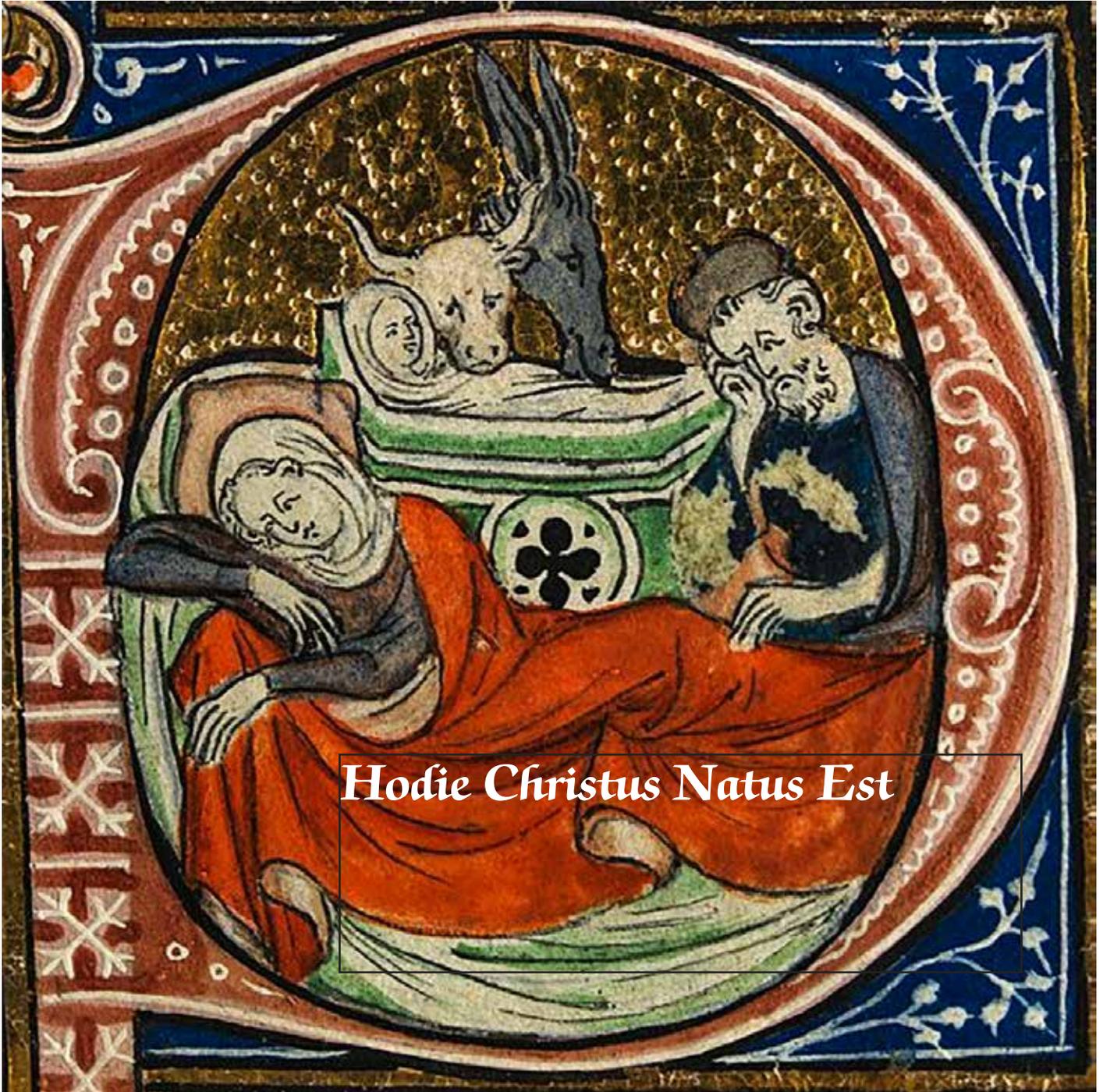


# Orate + Fratres



*Hodie Christus Natus Est*

From the Sherbrooke Missal, English 1310-1320

**INSIDE:** The Three Masses of Christmas ❖ Question: Our Lord descended into hell - What exactly does this mean? ❖ Schedule of Masses for the next three weeks

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# The Three Masses of Christmas Day



*Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry, a richly illustrated French book of hours, created between c. 1412 and 1416*

You may be wondering why there are three masses on Christmas Day: Midnight Mass, the Dawn Mass and the Day Mass. In the Roman Rite - originally - the liturgy of Christmas was celebrated in the basilica of St. Peter's in Rome, beginning with a night vigil at cockcrow ('ad galli cantum') and the Mass was celebrated at the third hour ('ad tertiam', about 9am). At the beginning of the fifth century the custom developed of concluding the night vigil with the first Mass of Christmas at the beginning of the morning ('primo mane'). Mass was also celebrated in Rome in the Church of St. Anastasia for the aristocratic neighbourhood of the Palatine. St. Anastasia is still commemorated at the second Mass of Christmas (see below).

It was under Pope Sixtus III (432-440), or his predecessor Pope Celestine I (422-432), that another church was built in Rome, after the Council of Ephesus, which affirmed the divine Maternity of the Blessed Virgin. This church of 'St. Mary Major' - one of Rome's four patriarchal basilicas - later received the relics of true crib wherein Our Lord Jesus Christ was placed after his birth. Here, in the oratory dedicated to the crib ('ad praesepe'), another night office was held, and the Gloria in excelsis - the chant of the angels on the first Christmas night - was sung. St. Leo the Great (l c. 400- 461) indicates that the gospel of the Annunciation was read. This celebration of Christmas in the night brought to mind the liturgy of the Basilica of the Nativity

in Bethlehem. The night Mass was followed by the singing of Lauds, which is still the practice in the traditional Roman liturgy. In the eighth century a Mass at Dawn was sung, with the commemoration of St. Anastasia. The Mass of the Day was probably the most solemn of the Christmas masses at this time, and was eventually sung at St. Mary Major's.

The celebration of the three Christmas masses were, for a long time, the privilege of the pope. From the tenth century onwards they were celebrated throughout the Latin Church, originally by three different priests. We have from St. Peter the Venerable, the abbot of Cluny (d.1156) the first indication that every Catholic priest could offer the three Christmas masses.

It is interesting to note that authors in the Middle Ages sought a symbolic or theological reason for the three masses. Frequently a symbolic meaning in the liturgy grows from an existing practice, and this is part of the richness of the liturgy. For example the Introit of the Midnight Mass relates to the eternally begotten Word (Dominus dixit ad me); the introit of the Dawn Mass relates to the spiritual birth of Christ in the hearts of the faithful (Lux fulgebit hodie super nos); and the introit of the Mass of the day relates to the birth of Christ in Bethlehem (Puer natus est nobis).

The gospel for the Third (Day) Mass of Christmas also presents, in a very marked way, the eternally begotten word, with the prologue of St. John. We see here, too, that 'light' (lux) is a very important feature of the Christmas liturgy. The divine light of God's Son, the Word made flesh, true God and true man, shines in the night, in the world where there is sin (see the Collect of the Midnight Mass). This light drives out the darkness in men's hearts (the Dawn Mass). The full brilliance of the divine light of Christ shines fully in the light of the day. The Alleluia verse of the Day Mass reads, Hodie descendit lux magna super terram ('today a great light descended upon the earth').

It seems very appropriate to celebrate three masses at Christmas, to be with Christ Our Lord at the crib in the darkness of night, and to be eager to adore him; to rise early in order to praise God for the beginning of a new day, which heralds Christ's birth in a pagan world; and in Christmas morning to rejoice and thank God for the gift of Himself, for the salvation of mankind.

## Question from the Pews:

**Did Our Lord descend into She'ol, Gehenna or Hades? Which one is the place of the damned?**

### Answer:

In short, Sheol is the Hebrew word for Hades which is Greek for the abode of the dead, Hell, the netherworld, is where souls separated from their bodies dwell outside of paradise/heaven.

Gehenna is exclusively the abode of the damned. While the word hell loosely applies to both in opposition to heaven, it only strictly applies to Gehenna which is the abode of the damned. This is current usage outside of the Apostles' Creed. *Let us look at the Catechism of Trent:*

ARTICLE V : "HE DESCENDED INTO HELL, THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN FROM THE DEAD"

### **First Part of this Article: "He Descended into Hell"**

In the first part of this Article, then, we profess that immediately after the death of Christ His soul descended into hell, and dwelt there as long as His body remained in the tomb; and also that the one Person of Christ was at the same time in hell and in the sepulchre. Nor should this excite surprise; for, as we have already frequently said, although His soul was separated from His body, His Divinity was never parted from either His soul or His body.

### **"Hell"**

As the pastor, by explaining the meaning of the word hell in this place may throw considerable light on the exposition of this Article, it is to be observed that by the word hell is not here meant the sepulchre, as some have not less impiously than ignorantly imagined; for in the preceding Article we learned that Christ the Lord was buried, and there was no reason why the Apostles, in delivering an Article of faith, should repeat the same thing in other and more obscure terms.

Hell, then, here signifies those secret abodes in which are detained the souls that have not obtained the happiness of heaven. In this sense the word is frequently used in Scripture. Thus the Apostle says: At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and in hell; and in the Acts of the Apostles St. Peter says that Christ the Lord is again risen, having loosed the sorrows of hell.

### **Different Abodes Called Hell"**

These abodes are not all of the same nature, for among them is that most loathsome and dark prison in which the souls of the damned are tormented with the unclean spirits in eternal and inextinguishable fire. This place is called gehenna, the bottomless pit, and is hell strictly so called.

Among them is also the fire of purgatory, in which the souls of just men are cleansed by a temporary punishment, in order to be admitted into their eternal country, into which nothing defiled entereth. The truth of this doctrine, founded, as holy Councils declare, on Scripture, and confirmed by Apostolic tradition, demands exposition from the pastor, all the more diligent and frequent, because we live in times when men endure not sound doctrine.

Lastly, the third kind of abode is that into which the souls of the just before the coming of Christ the Lord, were received, and where, without experiencing any sort of pain, but supported by the blessed hope of redemption, they enjoyed peaceful repose. To liberate these holy souls, who, in the bosom of Abraham were expecting the Saviour, Christ the Lord descended into hell.

### **"He Descended"**

We are not to imagine that His power and virtue only, and not also His soul, descended into hell; but we are firmly to believe that His soul itself, really and substantially, descended thither, according to this conclusive testimony of David: Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell.

But although Christ descended into hell, His supreme power was in no degree lessened, nor was the splendour of His sanctity obscured by any blemish. His descent served rather to prove that whatever had been foretold of His sanctity was true; and that, as He had previously demonstrated by so many miracles, He was truly the Son of God.

This we shall easily understand by comparing the causes of the descent of Christ with those of other men. They descended as

captives; He as free and victorious among the dead, to subdue those demons by whom, in consequence of guilt, they were held in captivity. Furthermore all others descended, either to endure the most acute torments, or, if exempt from other pain, to be deprived of the vision of God, and to be tortured by the delay of the glory and happiness for which they yearned; Christ the Lord descended, on the contrary, not to suffer, but to liberate the holy and the just from their painful captivity, and to impart to them the fruit of His Passion. His supreme dignity and power, therefore, suffered no diminution by His descent into hell.



*Image of hell from medieval manuscript*



*Purgatory by Columbe in Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry, 1412-1416, an illuminated French book of hours*



*Before his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ grants salvation to souls by the Harrowing of Hell. Fresco, by Fra Angelico, c. 1430s*



# Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest

## Shrewsbury Weekly Schedule \*



		<b>Ordo</b>	<b>Cathedral</b>	<b>St Winefride's</b>	<b>Mass Intention</b>
Sun	22 Dec	IV Sunday of Advent		11.15 Sung Mass	*Fr Geert Van De Walle RIP Dominik
Mon	23 Dec	Feria.	7.30am Low Mass		Benamina Keth
Tue	24 Dec	Vigil, I class.	7.30am Low Mass	11.30pm Carols before Midnight Mass	* Elizabeth Cathrin
Wed	25 Dec	<b>On the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, I class with an octave.</b> 	*No 7.30am Mass	*Midnight Mass (Sung) *11.15am Sung Mass of Christmas Day	Novena 1 (Midnight Mass) * Sister Philomena Bowers * Gribbin's Family Novena 2 (Mass of the Day) * the Souls of Priests in Purgatory who are most in need. * M.H.
Thu	26 Dec	II day within the octave of the Nativity of the Lord, St. Stephen Protomartyr, II class.	*No 7.30am Mass *No Holy Hour/Benediction	*10.45am Confessions *11.15 Low Mass	* Sister Mary Morgan Novena 3
Fri	27 Dec	III day within the octave of the Nativity of the Lord, St. John Apostle and Evangelist, II class.	7.30am Low Mass	6pm Holy Hour with Benediction and Confessions 7pm Low Mass	Novena 4 Violetta Hartley
Sat	28 Dec	IV day within the octave of the Nativity of the Lord, The Holy Innocents, II class.		10.45am Confessions 11.15 Low Mass	* Winefride Merry Novena 5
Sun	29 Dec	Sunday in the Octave of the Nativity, II class.		11.15 Low Mass	Novena 6 * Dorin and Ingemas Axelsson
Mon	30 Dec	Of the VI day within the Octave of the Nativity, II class.	7.30am Low Mass		* Rev. Louis Catteral, S.M.M., RIP Novena 7
Tue	31 Dec	Of the VII day within the Octave of the Nativity, II class, Commemoration of St. Sylvester I Pope and Confessor.	7.30am Low Mass	7pm Low Mass *11pm Holy Hour with Te Deum, Veni Creator and Benediction at Midnight	Novena 8 The poor souls
Wed	1 Jan	Octave of the Nativity of the Lord, I class.		*11.15 Low Mass	Novena 9 The Souls of Priests in Purgatory who are most in need
Thu	2 Jan	Feria.	7.30am Low Mass *No Holy Hour/Benediction		(Available to receive Mass Intentions.)
Fri	3 Jan	Feria.	7.30am Low Mass	6pm Holy Hour with Benediction and Confessions 7pm Low Mass	(Available to receive Mass Intentions.)
Sat	4 Jan	Feria.		10.45am Confessions 11.15 Low Mass	(Available to receive Mass Intentions.)
Sun	5 Jan	The most holy Name of Jesus, II class.		11.15 Sung Mass	(Available to receive Mass Intentions.)
At St. Wulstan: Sung Mass at 3.15pm Little Malvern					
Mon	6 Jan	On the Epiphany of the Lord, I class.	7.30am Low Mass	7pm Sung Mass	(Available to receive Mass Intentions.)
Tue	7 Jan	Feria.	7.30am Low Mass	6pm Holy Hour with Benediction and Confessions 7pm Low Mass	(Available to receive Mass Intentions.)
Wed	8 Jan	Feria.	7.30am Low Mass		(Available to receive Mass Intentions.)
Thu	9 Jan	Feria.	7.30am Low Mass 11am Holy Hour and Benediction with Confessions.		(Available to receive Mass Intentions.)
Fri	10 Jan	Feria.	7.30am Low Mass	6pm Holy Hour with Benediction and Confessions 7pm Low Mass	(Available to receive Mass Intentions.)
Sat	11 Jan	Our Lady on Saturday, Comm. of St. Hyginus Pope and Martyr.		10.45am Confessions 11.15 Low Mass	(Available to receive Mass Intentions.)
Sun	12 Jan	The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, II class.		11.15 Sung Mass	(Available to receive Mass Intentions.)

\*Change from the usual schedule \*Intention for a Mass said privately