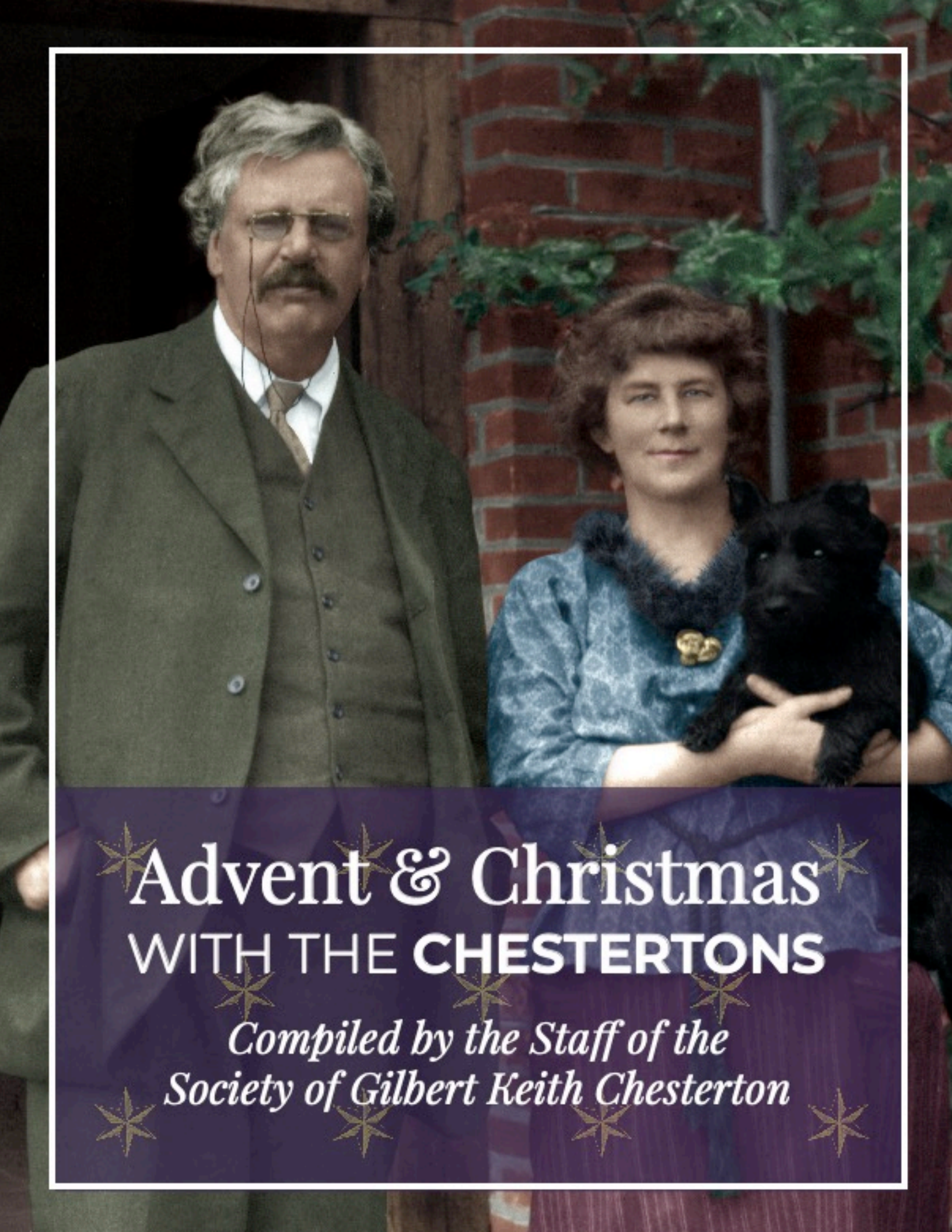


Advent & Christmas
WITH THE CHESTERTONS

Compiled by the Staff of the
Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton

About Gilbert Keith Chesterton

Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874-1936) is a writer like none other. As a journalist, he wrote thousands of essays for the London newspapers. But he also wrote a hundred books, contributions to 200 more, hundreds of poems, including the epic *Ballad of the White Horse*, five plays, five novels, and some two hundred short stories, including a popular series featuring the priest-detective, Father Brown.

Chesterton wrote on every conceivable subject, but his vast output is matched only by the consistency and clarity of his thought, his uncanny ability to tie everything together. In the heart of nearly every paragraph lies a jaw-dropping aphorism or sparkling paradox that leaves readers shaking their heads in wonder.

This man who composed such profound and perfect lines as "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried," stood 6'4" and weighed about 300 pounds, usually had a cigar in his mouth, and walked around wearing a cape and a crumpled hat, tiny glasses pinched to the end of his nose, swordstick in hand, laughter blowing through his mustache.

This absent-minded, overgrown elf of a man, who laughed at his own jokes and amused children at birthday parties by catching buns in his mouth, this was the man who wrote a book called *The Everlasting Man*, which led a young atheist named C.S. Lewis to become a Christian. This was the man who wrote a novel called *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, which inspired Michael Collins to lead a movement for Irish Independence. This was the man who wrote an essay in the

Illustrated London News that inspired Mohandas Gandhi to lead a movement to end British colonial rule in India.

His writings have been praised by many famous writers, including Orson Welles who called his prose "shamelessly beautiful." T.S. Eliot said that Chesterton "deserves a permanent claim on our loyalty."

We're working to help as many people in as many places as possible discover Chesterton and learn from him. Why? You cannot consider yourself educated until you have read Chesterton. And furthermore, reading Chesterton is almost a complete education in itself.

Chesterton is indeed a teacher, and the best kind. He broadens your view and deepens it. He sheds light on everything. He doesn't merely astonish you. He doesn't just perform the wonder of making you think, he performs the great service of making you laugh.

The truth, after all, should not depress us, it should bring us joy.

First Sunday of Advent

"The old Trinity was of father and mother and child and is called the human family. The new is of child and mother and father and is called the Holy Family. It is in no way altered except in being entirely reversed; just as the world which is transformed was not in the least different, except in being turned upside-down."
-G.K. Chesterton (*The Everlasting Man*)

Reflection

The birth of Christ turned the world upside down. It was an earth-shattering event that cracked the heavens. A new star was born, and under it huddled the Holy Family, oblivious to the cold outside, glowing with joy and peace. As we make the journey to Bethlehem during this Advent season, let us remain close to the Holy Family as we, with Joseph and Mary, anticipate the birth of Christ.

Prayer

O God, You placed in the hearts of Gilbert and Frances Chesterton a special devotion to the Nativity. Help us, like them, to remain watchful, peaceful, and hopeful during this time of penance and preparation. We ask this through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.
Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 2

"True contentment is a thing as active as agriculture. It is the power of getting out of any situation all that there is in it. It is arduous and it is rare."
-G.K. Chesterton (*Daily News*, June 10, 1911)

Reflection

Am I satisfied with what I have? Am I content with my life? Or am I hungry for more? Do I need the next new thing? How can I focus on getting "all that there is" in any situation during this time of preparation?

Prayer

Lord, You know the desires of my heart, but You also know what will bring me the most joy, contentment, and peace. Help me to live my life the way You would want me: to the fullest. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 3

Step softly, under snow or rain,
To find the place where men can pray;
The way is all so very plain
That we may lose the way.
-G.K. Chesterton (*The Wise Men*)

Reflection

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Jesus *is* the way. It's that simple, yet so difficult. It's difficult to remain on the path close to Him. It's hard to say "yes" to Christ and "no" to things that make us lose our way, because sometimes we don't recognize we are lost.

Prayer

Jesus, help me to remain close to you during this time of waiting and preparation. Help me to be confident in following Your way and not my own. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 4

"Christmas is utterly unsuited to the modern world. It presupposed the possibility of families being united, or reunited, and even of the men and women who chose each other being on speaking terms. Thus thousands of young adventurous spirits, ready to fly to the ends of the earth and tolerate every alien or accidental quality in cannibals or devil-worshipers, are cruelly forced to face an hour, nay sometimes even two hours, in the society of Uncle George; or some aunt from Cheltenham whom they do not particularly like. Such abominable tortures cannot be tolerated in a time like ours." -G.K. Chesterton ("Christmas Must Go," *G.K.'s Weekly*, December 7, 1933)

Reflection

Who in my life needs to hear from me? Who do I need to forgive? Who do I need to ask for forgiveness? Is there any way that I can bring joy or peace to someone just by contacting them? Maybe there's a family member I've not seen in a while. Perhaps there's an old friend who should hear from me.

Prayer

Jesus, Prince of Peace, grant me the courage to make amends with others that I have hurt. Help me to bring peace and forgiveness by taking the first step to reach out to those in my life who have lost touch with me. Help change my heart. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 5

Misers haggle and madmen clutch,
And there is peril in praising much.
-G.K. Chesterton (*The Truce of Christmas)*

Reflection

When we begin to live for possessions, our lives turn empty and cold. When we start to clutch and grab for things, instead of receiving everything gratefully as a gift, we begin to take things, people, and even God for granted. What can we do this Advent season to set our sights on Christ, the ultimate Christmas gift? Let us strive to be grateful receivers.

Prayer

Lord, please renew in me a sense of thanksgiving for all the gifts You have bestowed upon me. Help me let go of unnecessary things in my life that distract me from living the life you gave me as a birthday gift. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 6

"Personally, of course, I believe in Santa Claus; but it is the season of forgiveness and I will forgive others for not doing so."
-G.K. Chesterton ("The Red Angel," *Tremendous Trifles*)

Reflection

St. Nicholas of Myra was a bishop known for his good works and generosity to the poor. He once saved three young sisters from a life of destitution by droppin-g bags of money in their window. He was a well-known defender of the Faith, especially during the council of Nicea when Arian heresy was running rampant. As St. Nicholas was listening to Arius claim that God the Son was not equal to God the Father, the Bishop became enraged and smacked Arius in the face! He was penitent after, of course, but his brother Bishops stripped him of his title and threw him in jail where he had visions of Jesus and Mary.

Prayer

St. Nicholas, help us to uphold the true meaning of Christmas by imitating your zeal for the faith, your love for the poor, and your generosity without complaint. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 7

We have hands that fashion and heads that know,
But our hearts we lost--how long ago!
-G.K. Chesterton (*The House of Christmas*)

Reflection

Knowledge and creativity are from God and are good, but only if put to use for good, for truth, and for beauty. Art can be meditative, reading and studying can be edifying, but it is in our hearts where God would love to dwell. Let this Advent be a time when we open our hearts to God's word and His plan for our lives in a new and radical way.

Prayer

O God, longing of our hearts, help me seek to love you more by loving those around me. Help me to love with your love, and so love more than I believe I am capable. Help me love both friend and neighbor, relatives—and even enemies. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Second Sunday of Advent

A word came forth in Galilee, a word like to a star;
It climbed and rang and blessed and burnt
wherever brave hearts are.
-G.K. Chesterton (*A Word*)

Reflection

This world is so full of noise, it can be hard to listen to the Word of God; it can be hard to even pray. Let us fight the dictatorship of noise and distractions by silencing our phones, putting away our screens, and finding a quiet space to seek God, our King. Now hidden in the darkness of Mary's womb, Jesus is there, waiting. We can find him in that quiet place, and gently be with him in that dark and holy warmth, in silence and peace.

Prayer

O Jesus, help me find quiet, help me listen, help me find inner peace, which I long for with all my heart. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 9

The Christ-child stood on Mary's knee,
His hair was like a crown,
And all the flowers looked up at Him,
And all the stars looked down.
-G.K. Chesterton (*A Christmas Carol)*

Reflection

One of the beautiful things to ponder about the Blessed Mother is her vocation of motherhood. She taught Jesus so much: how to eat, how to walk, how to talk, how to wash feet. The image of the Christ-child standing on Mary's knee brings to mind some of the ways in which we see Mary as *our* Mother. She is supportive and strong, and she always brings us to Jesus. How has your mother supported you? Has she strengthened your faith? Has she brought you to Jesus? As we reflect on Mary's motherhood today, we are grateful for our mothers and those women in our lives who have been mothers to us.

Prayer

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come; before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 10

"Christmas has become too commercial; so many of these thinkers would destroy the Christmas that has been spoiled, and preserve the commercialism that has spoiled it."
-G.K. Chesterton ("The Winter Feast,"
The Apostle and the Wild Ducks)

Reflection

How can I simplify my life during this Advent season? Can I keep my sights on the Manger and not on the money? How can I avoid the hustle and bustle and keep my soul at peace as I await the birth of Christ?

Prayer

Hail, and blessed be the hour and moment at which the Son of God was born of a most pure Virgin at a stable at midnight in Bethlehem in the piercing cold. At that hour vouchsafe, I beseech Thee, to hear my prayers and grant my desires. Through Jesus Christ and His most Blessed Mother. Amen. (St. Andrew Christmas Novena) Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 11

"I demand for myself a proper Christmas card that is about Christmas."
-G.K. Chesterton (*Illustrated London News,* January 7, 1911)

Reflection

Sending Christmas cards is a tradition many people have given up, but the cards and letters at Christmas time are a wonderful way to keep in touch with our loved ones and friends whom we don't see as often as we'd like. Pick out a Christmas card today that truly recalls the meaning of the season, and not just the sentimental "Happy Holidays" of the Secular Day of Commercialism. Or better yet: write your own Christmas poem and draw your own nativity picture for your Christmas Card friends this year.

Prayer

Jesus, help me remember what we are celebrating by turning to traditional ways of honoring your feast day. Give me time this season for cards and letters, caroling and hot chocolate, hosting Christmas gatherings, and reading by the fireplace. If I've become a Scrooge, O Lord, help turn my bitterness to joy. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 12

Little Child Jesus, Jesus dear Child,
Mary, His Mother ('twas Mary who smiled),
Joseph, dear Father, see we kneel here,
Tell us, oh tell us, may we draw near?
-Frances Chesterton (*A Lullaby Carol*)

Reflection

There are countless depictions of the Blessed Mother, and she is not always smiling in them. She is very rarely depicted as having a dazzling, toothy, ear-to-ear grin, but one can imagine the absolute joy on her face as she looked down at her newborn Son as He burbled and cooed up at her. One can imagine the sweet peace she experienced as she and Joseph cuddled the snuggly Baby together against the cold night. One can imagine her soft and sweet smile as she reflected on all these things in her heart. Let us imitate her radiant joy.

Prayer

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this, our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray.

Almighty and everlasting God, Who by the working of the Holy Spirit didst prepare both body and soul of the glorious Virgin Mother, Mary, that she might deserve to be made a worthy dwelling for Thy Son, grant that we who rejoice in her memory, may, by her loving intercession, be delivered from present evils and from lasting death, through the same Christ our Lord.
Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 13

The world grows terrible and white,
And blinding white the breaking day;
We walk bewildered in the light
For something is too large for sight,
And something much too plain to say.
-G.K. Chesterton (*The Wise Men*)

Reflection

Today is the feast day of St. Lucy of Syracuse, a young woman who was martyred for her Christian faith. Her name means "bringer of light." How can we bring the Light of Christ to others this Advent? A smile? A kind word? Maybe we can visit those who are ill, or reach out to people in our lives that have lost touch with us. How can we, like St. Lucy, die to ourselves for the glory of God? St. Lucy is also the patron of good eyesight. What can we do to see Christ in others—and even in ourselves—during this holy season?

Prayer

O God, you gave St. Lucy the courage to love You with her whole heart and to die for the Faith. Good St. Lucy, help me to bring the light of Christ to others so that they may encounter Him and give glory to God. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 14

The road is so dark, the way is so drear,
Our bodies are weary, our hearts full of fear.
-Frances Chesterton (A Lullaby Carol)

Reflection

As the Year of Our Lord 2019 draws to a close, the days grow shorter and shorter, with less light and more darkness. Jesus, the Light of the World, came because we get lost in that darkness. The darkness is outside, in the night sky, but it is also upon our souls and hearts— even our minds are darkened to the truths of the faith. Jesus comes to bring us light. He comes when we are weary, when we're afraid, when we've lost our way. He comes when we humbly say to him, "Lord, I need your Light." We cannot make light on our own. It can only come to us as a gift.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, enlighten the eyes of my mind, help me see with the eyes of Faith. Light up the way, give me strength, take away my fears and my weaknesses, take away my sadness and my anxiety. Make me whole, O Holy Spirit, and wholly Yours forever.
Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Gaudete Sunday

Third Sunday of Advent

"Now, Christianity, whatever else it is, is an explosion."
-G.K. Chesterton ("The Theology of Christmas Presents," *The Contemporary Review,* January 1910)

Reflection

Up until recently, the world was divided into BC and AD: Before Christ and After Christ, or Anno Domini (The Year of Our Lord). Most academics now refuse to acknowledge what the rest of the world realized for the last 2,000 years: the coming of Christ split time in two. The substitute, BCE and CE (Before the Common Era and Common Era) say nothing about Christ and yet, they use the same time, the same years. Taking Christ's name out of the picture will never take Christ Himself out of the picture. Christ came, the world exploded into two; before He came, and now.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Your arrival on earth created an earthquake beginning in Bethlehem and rippling out to the ends of the earth. Help me do my part in keeping alive the knowledge of your birth, an explosion that shocked a small town in Judea 2,000 years ago, and continues even to where I live today. Keep me joyfully faithful to your teaching, and never let me be parted from You.
Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 16

"Literature has almost failed in endeavouring to describe happiness as a state."
-G.K. Chesterton ("Dickens' Christmas Tales," Introduction to *Christmas Books)*

Reflection

What if, instead of complaining or gossiping, we sat around and talked about all the things that make us happy? If happiness is elusive or seems distant, start with small things: I'm happy to be alive, I'm happy the sun is shining, I'm happy the stars twinkle in the sky. Every day, we should be able to think of a few things that make us happy. As we get better at identifying those things, we slowly turn our hearts and minds into happiness-identifying organs. Happiness, Chesterton says, is not without, but within. We can learn to be happy.

Prayer

As Your Nativity approaches, O Lord, help me see joy in the things of my life: my parents, my siblings, my children, the trees, the beautiful snow, the Child in the manger, the friends you've put in my life, the sky, the ocean, music—thank you for everything beautiful in this world, Lord. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 17

"The Merry Christmas is not slowly dying but slowly reviving."
-G.K. Chesterton (*Illustrated London News,* December 24, 1921)

Reflection

What makes Christmas wonderful and merry, according to Dickens, is "keeping" Christmas. Scrooge's life was changed over night by the visit of the three ghosts, and his conversion turned him from a miser to a giver. Scrooge was suddenly a man who wanted to give gifts, buy turkeys, help a family who needed a good doctor for their boy. He shouted "Happy Christmas!" to strangers, gave generously to charitable organizations, and heard the glorious church bells as if for the first time. What if we had a night like Scrooge? What if we woke up changed? What would we do? Where would we go? What gifts would we give? What hearts could we cheer?

Prayer

God Our Father, I don't mean to be like Scrooge, but sometimes I am. Change my heart; soften my heart, warm my heart. Give me your Light and your Love so that I can see with new eyes those near and dear to me. Help me give myself away in love, not counting the cost, not thinking of myself, but only wanting the happiness and health and well-being of others. Help me forget myself. Abide in me, O Lord. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 18

"About all Christmas things there is something a little nobler, if only nobler in form and theory, than mere comfort; even holly is prickly."
-G.K. Chesterton ("Dickens' Christmas Tales," Introduction to *Christmas Books)*

Reflection

Chesterton seems to suggest that in order to celebrate Christmas, we might have to be a wee bit uncomfortable. Certainly, when we get together with family, we'd love to have everyone's attention. We'd love to tell our stories, love to have someone notice our new haircut or clothes, love to be asked what we've been doing lately. But if we truly want happiness, we must prepare ourselves to listen to what others have to say. We should listen more than talk. While the other is talking, we should not be thinking of what we are going to say next, but we should enter into the other's story, and stay with them. We need, in fact, to die to ourselves. Ourself has a big ego, and wants attention. But the way of Jesus is the way of emptying ourselves and allowing Christ to dwell in our earthen vessel.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help me overcome my need to be the center of attention and empty myself so that you can dwell in my heart now and forever. Come, Lord Jesus! Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 19

Hark! Laughter like a lion wakes
To roar to the resounding plain,
And the whole heaven shouts and shakes,
For God Himself is born again,
And we are little children walking
Through the snow and rain.
-G.K. Chesterton (*The Wise Men*)

Reflection

A recurring theme of Chesterton's writings is returning to a state of childlike innocence. It seems especially good at this time of year to contemplate babies and young children, who embody wonder and amazement at the world. Children love the rain and snow, they want their raincoats and boots, they want to splash in puddles and sled down hills. There is a way to recapture that sense of childhood, that sense of wonder at the wind and snow, and that is to share those experiences with a child again, and remember how it felt when we were young. Look at a child, see how he experiences the world, and then go, and do the same.

Prayer

Lord, help me to regain my childlike innocence, help me want to be less sophisticated; less worldly, less fashionable, less up-to-date. Give me wisdom, that I may desire innocence. Baby Jesus, teach me the ways of childhood. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 20

"In the congested commerce of our time [Christmas] has come to stand rather for goods being sold than for gifts being given."
-G.K. Chesterton ("The Winter Feast,"
The Apostle and the Wild Ducks)

Reflection

My desire is to give lots of gifts, to give the perfect gift, to surprise my loved ones with the presents I've wrapped. I've spent time considering what gift is best for each person, and my heart swells as I tape the wrapping paper, and I hope that this gift is just right. And if I haven't done so, there is still time. Today, spend time thinking of the perfect gift to give those you love, and wrap with tenderness and love.

Prayer

Light of the World, as we approach the darkest day of the year, I depend on Your light to show me the way. Give me grace and wisdom; help me to remember my role in life as a Child of my Father in Heaven. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 21

God abides in a terrible patience,
Unangered, unworn
-G.K. Chesterton (*The Nativity)*

Reflection

Many years ago, Dom Hélder Câmara wrote a mass setting, in which he said that Christ was born at midnight. When asked why he believed the Christ Child was born at midnight, he answered, "Because midnight is pregnant with the Dawn." As we await in darkness the fulfillment of the Pregnancy of Pregnancies, as we experience midnight, pregnant with the dawn, we know that if we are patient, the sun—and the Son—will be born and rise.

Prayer

Lord, let the darkness turn to light, for I am afraid I may not see another dawn. The darkness sometimes overwhelms me, O Lord. Give me courage, give me peace, give me strength to overcome my personal darkness, and the fears I have. Help me remember midnight is pregnant with the dawn. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Our peace is put in impossible things
Where clashed and thundered unthinkable wings
Round an incredible star.
-G.K. Chesterton (*The House of Christmas*)

Reflection

Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, utters no words in the Gospels. His actions and the description of his person, however, speak volumes. For example, in today's Gospel reading, we see that Joseph is a righteous, quiet, and obedient man. God chooses to speak peacefully to Joseph in his dreams. Joseph's confidence in the will of God is so strong that he takes action immediately upon waking, and he is at peace. Lord, help us to listen to your commands and strive to imitate St. Joseph's example of quiet strength and obedience.

Prayer to the Sleeping St. Joseph

O Saint Joseph, you are a man greatly favored by the Most High. The angel of the Lord appeared to you in dreams, while you slept, to warn you and guide you as you cared for the Holy Family. You were both silent and strong; a loyal and courageous protector.

Dear Saint Joseph, as you rest in the Lord, confident of His absolute power and goodness, look upon me. Please take my need to your heart, dream of it, and present it to your Son. Help me then, good Saint Joseph, to hear the voice of God, to arise, and act with love. I praise and thank God with joy. Saint Joseph, I love you. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Advent | Day 23

"The best festivals of all are those held in the heart of fog or snow, like Christmas Day."
-G.K. Chesterton (*Illustrated London News,* May 19, 1906)

Reflection

We set up a miniature Nativity set in our homes during Advent, and those nativity sets are a small reminder of the true meaning of Christmas. St. Francis of Assisi was the first to organize a living nativity, a recreation of that first Holy Night. This evening, take a good look at your little Nativity set, and remember what happened there 2019 years ago. Then go out at look up at the stars, contemplating the heavens. Try to count the stars, and remember God's promise to Abraham, and the whole history of the Chosen Race. It has all come down to this: Bethlehem.

Prayer

God Our Father, the time is near for the fulfillment of your promise. Lord, help me keep my promises, keep my vows; help me be faithful to you in all I do. Watch over our families and help our Christmas gatherings reflect your love and grace, help us to be generous with our time, our talent and our treasure. Help our family be a Holy Family. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Christmas Eve

Here is a light, now let the candles flare,
Show to all travelers that the Child is here.
Come, take it so, see how the lantern bright
Bids all poor stragglers welcome here tonight.
-Frances Chesterton (*The Children's Crusade*)

Reflection

The stable door is open, the lamp is lit, the warm breath of the animals and the smell of the hay combine into a perfume that Christ Child will breathe in—his first breath on earth— in this small stable behind an inn. So simple, so natural. Let us hang our lamps out and open the door to our traveling friends and family and maybe even a stranger or two, and welcome them into our warm homes with Christmas cheer. For Christ is born of Mary, the fulfillment of all God's promises, and the angels sing Glory to God in the Highest, and all is right with the world.

Prayer

O God, we thank you for sending your Son as a Baby for us, thank you for sending a Star to guide us, for showing us the way back to heaven, to You. On this Holy Night, we thank you for the Babe in the Manger, and we ask you to give us this night, peace. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to all people of good will. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Christmas Day

Glory to God in the Lowest
The spout of the stars in spate--
Where the thunderbolt thinks to be slowest
And the lightning fears to be late;
As men dive for a sunken gem
Pursuing, we hunt and hound it,
The fallen star that has found it
In the cavern of Bethlehem.
-G.K. Chesterton (*Gloria in Profundis)*

Reflection

God, King and Creator of all things, humbled himself to become a child, a child born innocent and helpless, born in a poor stable, to poor parents. If we humble ourselves, who knows who we can become?

Prayer

Give us hearts so generous and good, O Lord, to humbly accept this Christ Child in our arms, to gaze into his beautiful eyes, and hold his tiny hand. Bring us joy and peace this Christmas, as we praise you forever for your wonderful goodness to us. Amen.
Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Christmastide

"The absolute once ruled the universe from a cattle stall."
-G.K. Chesterton ("The Christmas Ballads," *London Daily News*, December 24, 1901).

Reflection

Why must we spoil the new joy of Christmas with the story of the first martyr? We are reminded today that our life is not our own, that our destiny is not earth. We spend a little time here, which may seem long at first—yet look at the past 2,000 years and see how many generations have passed. Our generation will pass too, and soon we'll die and then what—what account will we give for our lives?

Prayer

O God of the Living and the Dead, help me fill my life worthily, giving selflessly and generously to others, forgetting my own needs, fears, and past, and living in the present with your heart, your hands, your face. Help me think more of others than myself, and live so that when I die, you'll welcome me with open arms, and I'll at last see you face to face. Give me the courage of St. Stephen. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Christmastide

"The fun of Christmas is founded on the seriousness of Christmas."
-G.K. Chesterton ("Dickens Again," *Illustrated London News,* December 21, 1912)

Reflection

The birth of Christ is an explosion in time, a stick of dynamite to the world, a time-changing event in the history of civilization. BC to AD. But what effect has this explosion had in my own life? What impact has this all-encompassing world-wide tsunami had in my own heart?

Prayer

Jesus, open my eyes to the revelation you wish to share with me today. Open my heart to your Word, and may that Word take root in my heart and bear fruit in my sphere of influence. I'm afraid to show the world that you've changed me—make me brave, give me courage, help me regain my lost innocence, and let me walk bravely about as a Child of the Light, constantly rejecting the world's darkness. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Christmastide

Here, here is comfort for one and for all,
Warmth in the manger, food in the stall,
Mary and Joseph a night watch to keep
Over tired children who dreamless shall sleep.
-Frances Chesterton (*A Lullaby Carol*)

Reflection

It is all too easy to ponder the innocent life lost to the anger of Herod and find comparison in the loss of life we experience today in the sin of abortion. Consider if God is asking you to be involved in the Pro-Life movement in any way today, whether that is praying at a clinic, giving to a billboard campaign, helping a mom financially or emotionally with her young family, or however it may be. Pro-life must mean action, help, and service if it is to truly save the innocent.

Prayer

Jesus, bless all those young lives lost before they had a chance to start, the unborn, the babies and toddlers who die before their time. Open my eyes to see the need in my own community to help young families struggling to cope with the stresses of today. Give me the nudge I need to help. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Fourth Sunday of Advent,
The Feast of the Holy Family

Rap softly on the door, then open it wide;
What shall we find if we peep inside?
A Baby in the hay, a Father near by
A Mother who sings a child's lullaby.
-Frances Chesterton (*A Lullaby Carol*)

Reflection

Perhaps the vision of the Holy Family prompts frustration in us that our family was nothing like Jesus'. A father left, a mother ensnared by addiction, a family ripped apart by divorce or war or something else. There is no perfect family, and as we come to accept the family we were born into, we consider how we can form a better family, a family that can be our source of strength, courage, and love in this world. Not a perfect family, but one that takes its inspiration from the Holy Family.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help me forgive my family of origin for the difficulties I endured, and help me form the family you want for me. Give me strength to parent the children you have placed or will place in our care. Help us to love as You love. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Christmastide

"The best way to shorten winter is to prolong Christmas."
-G.K. Chesterton (*Chesterton on Shaw)*

Reflection

As the glow of Christmas passes, maybe we can sit quietly in front of the tree, or the nativity set, and ponder how this Christmas has changed us. And if we feel it passed too quickly and nothing has changed, then ponder what we can do today to help change that. If we never had a chance to make Christmas cookies before Christmas, we could still make them today. Christmas cards can still be sent out, Christmas phone calls would still be most welcome as our friends and family would love to hear from us—presents can still be bought (and are probably now on sale) and wrapped with half-price wrapping paper. Our lonely neighbor is still next door, our parish priest still busy in the rectory. Find a way to keep celebrating Christmas today.

Prayer

God our Creator: help me keep the glow of Christmas just a little bit longer, as I ponder the gift of Your Son. Inspire me to give of myself in some way today. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Christmastide

"To have such an adventure as Christmas is to make an adventure recurrent and therefore, in one sense, to make an adventure everlasting."
-G.K. Chesterton (*Illustrated London News,* December 20, 1913)

Reflection

Lessons learned this Christmas: we love surprises, we love getting gifts, we love calls from old friends. We feel loved when a relative calls us out of the blue just to say hello, how are you? Our hearts glow when a neighbor brings over a gift of food. What does it take to give gifts, to be generous? It takes courage. Our fears hold us back from giving, our brains tell us our friend is busy, our neighbor won't like our choice of flavors, our Uncle is still angry from 12 years ago. Overcome fear with kindness. Be brave.

Prayer

O Lord, life is a great adventure which most times I am too frightened to see. Help me overcome my weaknesses and fears, and live the life you desire for me—a life of adventure, surprise, and joy. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

New Year's Day
Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

The Christ-child lay on Mary's heart,
His hair was like a fire.
(O weary, weary is the world,
But here the world's desire.)
-G.K. Chesterton (*A Christmas Carol)*

Reflection

Mary is a model mother, perfect in her "Yes" to God's will. She could have said no, she had free will. What is God asking of us today? Perhaps He will not send us an Angel, and so our task is not as clear as Mary's. Perhaps the writing is not on the wall for us. In silent contemplation, we can ask God what it is he wills for us, and listen for His answer. There are times we think we know what to do, and we proceed. If we are still unsettled even after making our decision, perhaps it was not the right decision. If we feel at peace, it could be a sign that our will is in alignment with God's. Ask the Holy Spirit for help with discernment.

Prayer

O God of all my decision making, help me to know Your will, and to do it. Give me patience to listen to your commands, and the courage to carry out your plans. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Christmastide

"I enjoy Christmas more than I did when I was a child."
-G.K. Chesterton (*Illustrated London News,* December 27, 1913)

Reflection

Children are vulnerable and innocent, and they need caring adults to help and love them. Gilbert and Frances gave preferential treatment and attention to the children in their lives because they understood this vulnerability. What children has God placed in our lives, and how can we give them preferential treatment and attention?

Prayer

Jesus, help me to recognize those sad and scared children in my life for whom I can give a loving ear to listen to their cares. Help me speak softly and gently to those children who need a loving adult in their life. Give me the gift of patience to give, as Gilbert and Frances showed by their example, preferential treatment to children. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Christmastide

"The idea of embodying goodwill— that is, of putting it into a body— is a huge and primal idea of the Incarnation. A gift of God that can be seen and touched is the whole point of the epigram of the creed. Christ Himself was a Christmas present."
- G.K. Chesterton (*The Contemporary Review*, January 1910)

Reflection

I have been given the best gift of all: Life; and I've been given life by the best Giver ever: God. What am I doing with the life I've been given, and how am I using this gift? Reverence the name of Jesus as a way to thank Him for the gift of life. Never take the name of the Lord in vain. Swearing, Chesterton said, was an easy and lazy way to speak. It takes more effort to try not to swear. Let's keep holy the name of God.

Prayer

O Lord, I have, up till now, not given you all the praise you deserve. I thank you now for the gift of my life, and ask you to help me spend the time I have left in doing good, in praising your name, and in blessing you in all your creation. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Christmastide

"The gold is brought to a stable; the kings go seeking a carpenter. The wise men are on the march, not to find wisdom, but rather a strong and sacred ignorance. The wise men came from the East; but they went Westward to find God."
-G.K. Chesterton (*The Contemporary Review,* January 1910)

Reflection

Life is a journey, our goal is Heaven. Whether we know it or not, we are traveling, following a star, trying to find Christ. Our whole life has led us to this point: now we must humbly accept that there is more to this life than we knew. Chesterton's "strong and sacred ignorance" is his way of talking again about that innocence that we need to seek out, to regain; the lost innocence of our youth. What steps can we make on our journey today towards innocence?

Prayer

O Jesus, my brother, teach me to be humble, to desire innocence and goodness, to regain my childlike sense of wonder at the beauty and glory of this amazing world you've created for me. Let my journey always be towards Bethlehem and You. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Second Sunday of Christmas

They wandered forth from earth's four corners far,
Following as the kings of old that star
That ever beckons souls to the unknown,
Because man cannot live by bread alone.
-Frances Chesterton (*The Children's Crusade)*

Reflection

We all have a God-shaped hole in our hearts. Our hearts will never be satisfied with the bread that the world offers us. What are we putting into that place in our hearts that is reserved for God? Video games, romance novels, alcohol, drugs, food, TV, porn? What addictions are we using to compensate for the intense desire for goodness, truth, and beauty? Whatever those addictions are, they will never satisfy. Beneath the Star of Bethlehem rests Goodness, Truth, and Beauty Himself. Fix your gaze on the Star, and follow it to the real desire of your heart.

Prayer

O Lord, my God, help me follow you more intentionally than I ever have before! Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Epiphany

"There were three things prefigured and promised by the gifts in the cave of Bethlehem concerning the Child who received them; that He should be crowned like a King; that He should be worshipped like a God, and that He should die like a man."
-G.K. Chesterton ("The Three Gifts,"
G.K.'s Weekly, December 12, 1931)

Reflection

What gifts have I brought to the Babe this Christmas Season? I can still offer Him something today, even if I've forgotten or been too busy, I can offer Him something now--what will it be?

Prayer

O Baby Jesus, I love you. I offer you today all that I am, all that I do, all that I say, and my whole heart, mind and soul. Please take them and help me use them only for You. Amen. Gilbert and Frances Chesterton, pray for us.

Bonus Article!

Frances Chesterton and Christmas

by Nancy Brown

Frances Chesterton, wife of famous British author and Christian apologist G.K. Chesterton, was obsessed by Christmas. Obsessed.

Frances had a nativity set up in every room, each one unique in size, shape, and style. She collected miniature ornaments and kept them on display all year round. She wrote Christmas plays, spending months writing, planning, sewing costumes and painting sets. Her poetry centered on a Christmas theme and each year she wrote a new poem to be included in the family Christmas card that she sent out to all of their friends.

Why? What was it about Christmas that drew Frances?

Frances Alice Blogg grew up in a Victorian middle class household that was perhaps troubled. Her mother suffered from depression, her father may have had affairs. George Blogg died of a heart attack at the youthful age of 41, when Frances was just fourteen. Her broken home only continued to break more as time went on: her beloved sister Gertrude died in a bicycle accident, and her brother committed suicide. When she met and married Gilbert Keith Chesterton, she may have thought her life was complete. Her broken family was once again whole.

But she continued to experience brokenness. The early years of her marriage passed, and no babies came along. The couple saw several doctors, and Frances had operations, but nothing cured the problem. And the couple failed to do the one thing Frances had wanted more than anything: to have a whole family. And what she experienced instead was more brokenness.

However, their infertility did not overwhelm them. Gilbert and Frances were a strong couple, they had

faith, and they believed God had a plan for their lives. They made a decision to welcome all children, and this extended to the Christ Child—or perhaps instead the Christ Child inspired them.

From the moment they discovered that they could no longer hope to have biological children, Gilbert and Frances seem to have made a pact. They would welcome children into their homes and hearts as often as they could. When choosing the railway car when they traveled, they chose the car with the most children. If families came over to visit, they made a point to talk to the children and made sure they felt welcomed.

At first, the couple had one nativity set, which they set up each Christmas. But during their early travels, Frances came upon another nativity set she loved, and when she got it home, she set it up immediately. From then on, whenever she saw a set she liked, she bought it and set it up in another room.

And as she looked at that nativity, with tiny little baby Jesus, she began to contemplate that wintry scene. She used her imagination to wonder what it would be like to hold the Christ Child? What if she touched his tiny hand? What if she felt the ox and ass breathing in the stable? What if she saw Mary and Joseph?

And as she thought about these things, and more, she began composing poetry. How far is it to Bethlehem? She wondered, perhaps even looking on a map. But then she thought of another layer to that question. How far is it for me to get to the Holy Family? Can I have a holy family…even if I don't have children? What kind of family do I have if I invite Jesus—in the hidden disguise of my neighbors, nieces and nephews—into my family?

Frances and Gilbert wondered what it would be like to adopt a baby. Frances's sister Ethel lived nearby and had five children, and two of the girls were particularly close to their Auntie Frances and Uncle Chestnut. Should they adopt them? The idea was

contemplated, and then dropped. The girls were already family.

During this time, Frances wrote a lovely Christmas play called The Christmas Gift, in which the father, missing in the First World War, finally returns home with a foundling in his arms. The parents already have three children, but the mother takes the baby in as her own. “Is he the Christ Child?” asks one of her children. “Oh darling, who can tell?” Frances has the mother answer. She reminds us that every child is an image of the Baby Jesus, and any baby just might be the Holy Child

Frances invited the children visiting her home to play games, cards, or sit and talk while sipping tea. The teen girls noted that Frances was a good listener and particularly helpful to them when they entered adolescence. But she was also good at making treasure hunts for the smaller ones. And then she loved plays and pageants. In a cupboard in the morning room of their home, the Chestertons had boxes and boxes of fabric and costumes, and wigs and

props of all sorts. Putting on a play or dressing up to spontaneously perform some bits from Shakespeare were common activities at the Chesterton home. Frances got all the children involved, painting sets and hammering boxes for tables. The Chesterton home had an interesting design element — in the living room was an area raised up a step, that had a curtain across it that could completely close. This area was made for putting on plays right in the living room. One small step, and you were on center stage.

Another happy place at the Chesterton home was the garden. Frances poured over the gardening and seed catalogs that came to the house, picturing the plants and how they would look in the garden. She loved planning out the order of the colors and planting tall spiky plants like foxglove, delphiniums and hollyhocks. Gilbert would give tours through the garden making up names for all the flowers, saying things like “Look, that one’s monk’s breath. This here is Bishop’s Bigamy,” and so forth. He said these words so seriously that most people didn’t catch that he was joking. Frances encouraged the children to

pick bouquets and arrange them in a vase, and as they arranged, they talked about life. The children played hide-and-seek with each other and fetch with the dog. The Chestertons had a slew of pets, including a donkey for the children to pet.

There's a saying that is sometimes repeated, although it seems more in the category of legend since there's never a source, that is this: Frances says to Gilbert, "Darling, why don't you write more about God?" as if she's critical of Gilbert's writing in the journals of the day. "My love," Gilbert supposedly says, "that's all I do write about."

As I said this may have never happened, and I suppose one reason I don't like it is because it puts Frances in a bad light. But when I do think about if this conversation ever did take place, I like to think that it's a little joke between Gilbert and Frances. This couple talked about God together and they prayed together. And Frances often read over Gilbert's essays and made small corrections in spelling and grammar (for which she jokingly charged him a penny per

correction), so she knows exactly what his essays are about and how he thinks about God. So I like to think she's joking when she asks why he doesn't write more about God. How can you write more about God when everything you write is about God?

Gilbert and Frances were obsessed by Christmas, because both of them loved the Christ Child—and because they loved children. Their poetry, plays and home decoration all reflected this; but more than that, their lives reflected this. Let us love the Christ Child and all the children that ever come into our lives, whether biologically or otherwise—as they both demonstrated.

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About Nancy Brown

Nancy Brown is the author of *The Woman Who Was Chesterto*n, a biography of Frances Chesterton, wife of British Journalist G.K. Chesterton

Advent and Christmas with the Chestertons

Compiled by the Staff of the Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton

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