

St. Andrew's Christmas Novena

The day is finally here! Saint Andrew's feast day!

This feast is the marker that determines the start of Advent. The first Sunday of Advent begins on the Sunday closest to (or on) November 30, St. Andrew's feast day. That explains the first part of the Saint Andrew Christmas Novena's name. The second part simply refers to when the novena ends – on Christmas. So a longer way of saying it is: The Saint Andrew to Christmas Day Novena. Kind of long, which is why it's also known simply as the Christmas Novena.

It is a short, deceptively simple, and beautiful Advent prayer that is traditionally said 15 times a day and zeros in on that epic, sacred moment when Christ, through His Blessed Mother, entered human history, and our destiny was forever changed.

Why 15 times a day? No one really knows, but I'll take a pious stab at some possibilities. The prayer is believed to be over 100 years old, and is traditionally prayed 15 times every day, though not necessarily all at once. (It may be broken up to be prayed throughout the day, such as five prayers in the morning, afternoon, and evening, the way the Angelus is repeated, or the Divine Office is spread out throughout the day.) The number 15 reminds me of the original 15 decades of the rosary, which was itself seen as a potentially simplified version of praying the 150 psalms that are still sung today by religious in monasteries and convents praying the Divine Office all over the world. There you go, not official, but it could explain why 15 times.

HAIL AND BLESSED BE THE HOUR AND MOMENT IN WHICH THE SON OF GOD WAS BORN OF THE MOST PURE VIRGIN MARY, AT MIDNIGHT, IN BETHLEHEM, IN PIERCING COLD.

It's an amazing visual! ...*at midnight, in Bethlehem, in piercing cold!* The repetition of the prayer really drives home how cold, dark, and isolated that moment was: when the most omnipotent being, the Son of God, in the dark of night slipped quietly into this side of the veil, through an extraordinary young woman. By those words, we allow ourselves to focus our hearts and minds squarely at that moment and just let ourselves 'be' in awe of the humble beginnings of our salvation and redemption, *at midnight, in Bethlehem, in piercing cold*. Just breathtaking!

Not to mention that the 15 repetitions a day definitely drives home the visual of how blessed that *hour and moment was at midnight, in Bethlehem, in piercing cold*, so much so, that those words just seem to waft in the subconscious all day long. Which is why it's such a perfect Advent prayer of preparation and petition. It helps to keep the scattered mind focused on spiritually preparing for Christmas during the busy and noisy modern holiday season.

Novenas traditionally only last nine days in honor of the first novena, or time of prayer, when the embryonic Church prayerfully waited in anticipation of the descent of the Holy Spirit between Ascension Thursday and Pentecost Sunday (nine days). Our word for nine comes from the Latin word novem, which is where we get novena from. Even though the Saint Andrew Christmas Novena lasts for 25 days, it still falls within the tradition of an 'anticipation prayer', like that first novena to the Holy Spirit. In fact, it is also often called simply the Christmas Anticipation Prayer.

HAPPY PRAYING!

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Hail and blessed be the hour
and moment in which the Son of God
was born of the most pure
Virgin Mary, at midnight,
in Bethlehem, in piercing cold.
In that hour, vouchsafe, O my God!
to hear my prayer
and grant my desires,
(Mention your intentions here)
through the merits of
Our Saviour Jesus Christ,
and of His Blessed Mother.
Amen.

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