

Areté 

ISSUE 4 | SUMMER EDITION

VELLS

et Remis



Sacred Journeys

Exploring the Spiritual Treasures of Pilgrimage



Guest contributor
Selina Hasham, Stories
of Grace, the History of
Christmas Traditions,
Areté Centre News and
more



Contents

Hello From Fr Chris	02
Pilgrims of Peace, Selina Hasham	03
Areté Centre News	07
Student Spotlight	08
Journey of Hope, Mina Mihas	11
On Open Waters, Melanie Dooner	14
Final Intensive Wrap Up	17
Catholic Christmas Traditions	19
Follow us	20

HELLO FROM

Chris

As many of you know, in November this year, I was due to lead a group of Areté students and graduates on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to explore the beauty and richness of the birthplace of Jesus.

That journey abruptly ended before it began with the tragic events that unfolded on October 7th. While the excitement and anticipation of our group were dealt a strong blow, our hearts went out to the many victims and their families, and to the victims who have suffered unimaginable loss, grief and sorrow, in the many weeks since.

So In this edition, we are grateful to Selina Hasham, CEO of Harvest Journeys, for sharing her poignant reflections on evacuating 130 pilgrims from the Holy Land amidst the ensuing chaos. Her narrative eloquently underscores that pilgrimage transcends physical boundaries and that it is a profound interior journey.

We also have a mosaic of powerful and moving stories from students and staff that invite us to pause and reflect on God's grace in our lives.



We also extend our deepest gratitude to our contributors and to you, our readers, for walking with us this year.

Wishing you a blessed and joy-filled Christmas season.

Fr Chris Ryan MGL
Director, Areté Centre
for Missionary Leadership

PILGRIMS OF PEACE

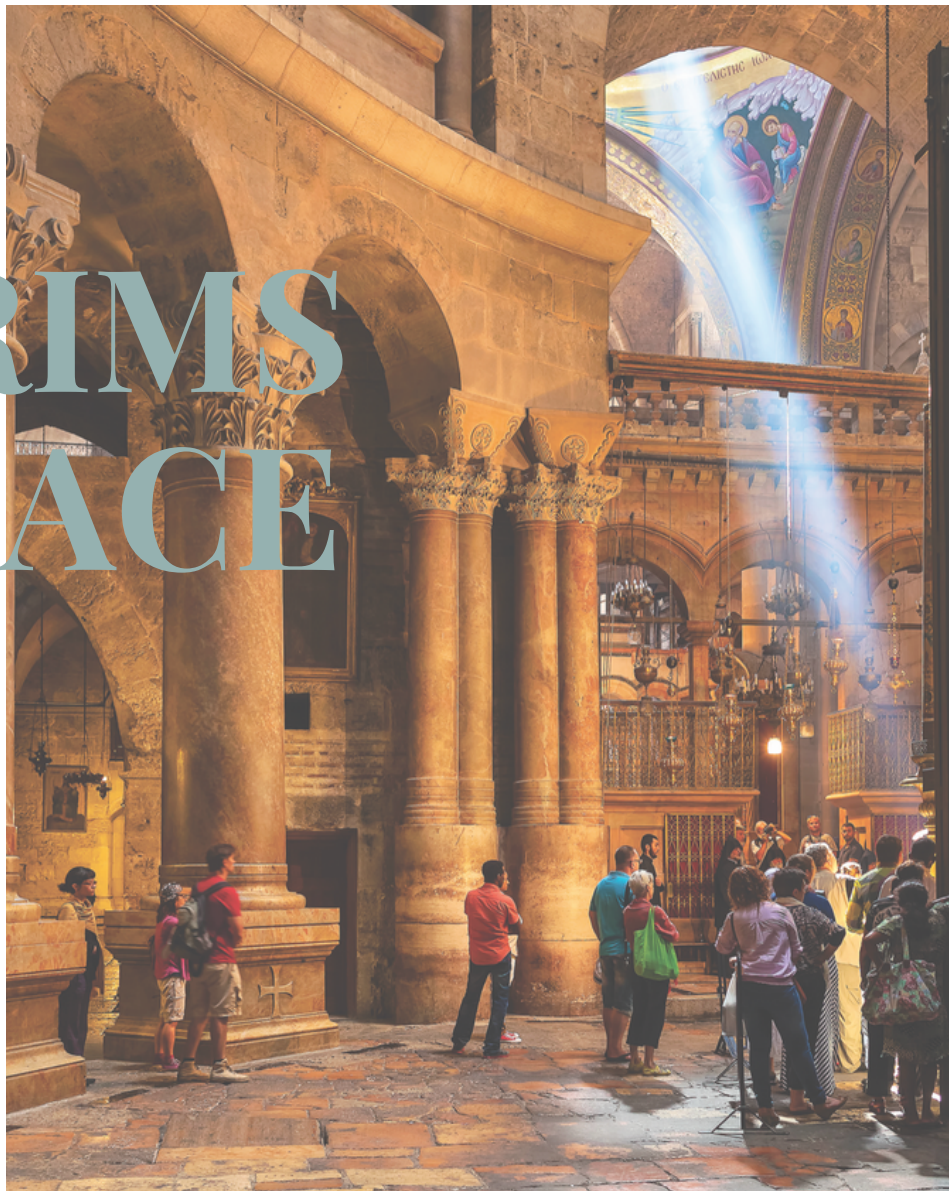
By Selina Hasham

Recently, my heart went out to 36 Arete pilgrims who had committed—and were very much looking forward—to a pilgrimage walking in the footsteps of Jesus to the Holy Land in November 2023.

When violence erupted in Israel on 7 October, which happens to be the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, Harvest Journeys had 130 pilgrims across four groups in various locations in the region.



Selina Hasham is the CEO of Harvest Journeys and Faculty member of the Areté Centre for Missionary Leadership.



Over 35 years of Harvest sending pilgrims to the Holy Land, we have experienced occasional flare-ups and conflicts in the region, and they have usually lasted a few days and then resolved. The gravity of this situation soon became apparent however, and we knew we had to act fast to get our pilgrims to safety. It also became clear that we would have to cancel any Holy Land groups we had planned for the remainder of the year.

Ancient pilgrims of old who set out on foot, would often bid their families farewell, unsure if they would ever return, so hazardous was the journey. The modern-day pilgrim travels with a greater assurance of safety, but their faith is still the most important thing they pack in their suitcase.

Thankfully, within three days all our pilgrims had been evacuated from Israel. As we precariously navigated our pilgrims out of a war zone,

I was struck by their great faith. To those whose journeys were cut short, I said—I'm sorry you didn't make it to Jerusalem—concerned that they had paid to go on a pilgrimage of a lifetime to the Holy City.

One pilgrim said to me, “It's ok, I made it to the Holy City in my heart”. She had gone on such a deep interior journey, that in some sense the destination did not matter.

I know Fr Chris and the Areté pilgrims had high hopes of watching the Gospels come alive by walking through lands and regions where Jesus himself walked, lived, preached and prayed. The Holy Land is also known as the ‘fifth gospel’ because you will never read the scriptures the same way after being there. From Bethlehem to Nazareth, from Galilee to Jerusalem, the ground on which you walk, and the stones you touch are sacred.

Their tools to forge peace are forgiveness and hope, which they believe, are more powerful than rockets and guns.

Our pilgrims also visit the 'living stones' of the Holy Land, the people who live, work, love, and sadly also, suffer there. These stones are the most sacred.

We had planned for the Areté group to visit our friends in Jerusalem, Rami and Bassam, to hear their stories. Rami is an Israeli Jew, and Bassam is a Palestinian Muslim. Rami's 14-year-old daughter was killed by a Palestinian Hamas suicide bomber in central Jerusalem in 1997. Bassam's 10-year-old daughter was shot dead by an Israeli border policeman outside her school in 2007.

Rami and Bassam have dedicated their lives to working tirelessly for peace in the troubled lands of Israel and the Palestinian territories, as part of a bereaved parents organisation. Their tools to forge peace are forgiveness and hope, which they believe, are more powerful than rockets and guns.

A few days ago, we connected with Rami and Bassam, to make sure they and their families were alright. They replied with these words, signed by both of them, close enough as they are to pen a message with one voice: "Thank you for your message and your ongoing support. While the atrocities take place right now, against thousands of innocent civilians, mainly children and women, very soon it will be over.

The warriors will let down their weapons maybe temporarily, but we as parents for peace, friends, and brothers, who know deeply in our hearts that one day we must live together side by side, have decided that we will never, ever let down our weapons. Our weapons are our humanity and faith in peace and justice in Palestine and Israel. One day, the occupation will end, and our people will remain. In peace, Rami & Bassam."

My heart goes out to these two brothers, and I pray with them, that very soon, the footsteps of pilgrims can walk again in peace throughout these holy lands.





Rami and Bassam



Smaday Elhanan, 1983-1997



Abir Aramin, 1997-2007



Pilgrims celebrate Mass on the Sea of Galilee



Bishop Columba Macbeth-Green



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Help us Form more Leaders for the Mission

At the Areté Centre, we wholeheartedly believe in the profound impact of lay formation for the renewal of our parishes. We invite you to become a crucial partner with us, paving the way for others to embark on a transformative personal journey that makes a real difference at the 'grass roots' level.

Our work makes a difference on the ground, where it matters - in our parishes. Your financial support assists us in our mission to equip students through our transformative Foundations of Missionary Leadership Program. In this program we assist our students to unlock their full potential as leaders who have been formed to effectively contribute to the the Church's evangelising mission. Visit www.aretecentre.org to contribute financially to the Areté Centre's mission. Your donation helps us keep our fees low for our students.



Frs Chris, Simon and Brett, and Brian from Divine Renovation



Spreading the Word

Fr Chris recently journeyed to Canada, where he and eight other priests from across the globe met with the leaders of the Divine Renovation Ministry to discuss next steps in the worldwide movement of parish renewal.

Fr Chris also recently led the diocesan clergy retreat for the Diocese of Wagga, speaking on the theme of mission. He delivered a keynote address at the Sydney Clergy Conference about the Areté Centre (along with Gina and John, who are past and present students).

In 2024 Fr Chris has been invited to speak with the clergy of Bathurst diocese and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate on the topic of Preaching on Purpose. He will also be speaking to clergy, principals, and leaders about mission in the dioceses of Lismore and Bathurst, as well as working with leaders in the NZ dioceses of Christchurch, Auckland, and Palmerston North.

We ask for your prayers for Fr Chris as he travels to these places to support these priests and leaders in their efforts to renew the Church.

Glenn McLachlan

Meet Glenn McLachlan, a distinguished graduate from our 2022 Cohort. His innate sense of leadership shines through as he holds the important position of Director of System Stewardship for Sydney Catholic Schools. Glenn is a member of the Catholic Development Fund Advisory Board, and also serves as a Director of CENET, which supports information, learning, and technology services across schools throughout NSW. This interview illustrates his conviction that the principles of servant leadership are vital for Catholic education.

What Parish do you belong to and do you serve in any way at that Parish?

My Parish is St Joseph's Oatley. The parish has recently been twinned with St Declan's Penshurst under the pastoral care of Fr Chis Ryan and the MGL's, so exciting changes are in store.

Currently my ministries at Oatley are as Acolyte, Minister of the Eucharist and Hospital Chaplain. It is a real privilege to bring the Eucharist to people, especially those who are unwell. Unfortunately COVID has impacted my participation at hospital in recent years. Since the Areté course I have also joined the Alpha program at Penshurst and that has been an amazing experience.

In what ways has Areté deepened your faith or relationship with Jesus, and how has this impacted your professional and personal life?

The Areté course was a wonderful experience and it is having a profound influence on my life. Through this transformative experience, I've cultivated a heightened awareness of God's presence in my day-to-day affairs and gained a profound understanding of how God has actively shaped the trajectory of my life. My daily prayer life has undergone a positive transformation, incorporating new and enriching techniques.

Moreover, the course has played a pivotal role in boosting my confidence in interpersonal relationships, fostering a more acute sensitivity to the needs of others. Additionally, it has instilled in me a newfound sense of patience, grounded in the belief that God is in control and always knows what is best. This journey with Areté has indeed left an indelible mark on my spiritual and personal growth.



What is one highlight or experience during your journey that you can share with us?

In one of our assignments we were asked to reflect on *Ad Gentes* (To the Nations), the Decree on Missionary Activity from Vatican II. *Ad Gentes* talked about the role of ordinary Christians in spreading the Gospel news. I learnt that evangelisation is not just the responsibility of religious men and women, and this started to change the way I thought about faith and what I should be doing. Amongst other things the lectures spoke about the early church and the formation of Christian communities, so as to encourage each other. This has been a significant outcome from Areté, the need for connection to a community and being able to talk about and explore faith. This has helped me gain greater confidence in being able to speak about Jesus with my other friends, colleagues and acquaintances who are not active church goers. Learning the stages of conversion also helped to understand how to frame these conversations.

“

I enjoyed the leadership lectures on what constitutes effective leadership qualities, and learning about vulnerability, resilience and “leading when not in charge”.

”

How have the lectures you have learned changed or impacted your leadership style in your professional work or as a parishioner?

I enjoyed the leadership lectures on what constitutes effective leadership qualities, and learning about vulnerability, resilience and “leading when not in charge”. I have tried to introduce these qualities into my professional and personal life, in particular;

- Leaders don't walk away from being vulnerable, leaders will take risks.
- Be authentic and courageous.



Glenn celebrating graduation with Fr Simon Lobo CC and fellow Areté students.



Forging bonds of friendship with fellow Areté Centre students of 2022.

- Be able to forgive yourself,
- Have resilience and humility, to handle push back.
- Empathy is to see the world as others see it, don't judge.
- To understand others we need to understand our own emotions.
- Resilience is about being able to get back up when you are knocked down, to accept criticism and graciously learn from it.
- Being an effective time manager and delegate to others.

Leaders need to keep focused on the mission and finally, being able to recognise your own weaknesses and shortcomings, so periods of self reflection are really important.

What did you find most challenging during the Areté journey?

The hardest part of the Areté journey was Wednesday night zoom lectures! Whilst I enjoyed the lectures and learnt heaps, it was a struggle at 8:45pm. In reality it was an excuse to eat chocolate.

What is your favourite Bible verse and why?

Since doing Areté I have learnt so much more about the bible, in particular the Old Testament, and I really liked the Acts of the Apostles. In the Acts you can see how the Apostles were renewed with such joy and vigour by the Holy Spirit, it transformed their lives.

However, my favourite bible verse is Matthew 8:2. This verse from Matthew is similar to many other stories of Jesus curing the sick, this particular one appeals to me. It is the response of Jesus that I find so striking when the leper asked do you want to heal me? Jesus without hesitation says of course I want to. I get a great sense of the love Jesus has for us and His willingness to want to be part of our lives and make it better.

Find out more about Glenn's Parish of St Joseph's of Oatley by [clicking here](#)

WHEN JESUS CAME DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN, LARGE CROWDS FOLLOWED HIM. SUDDENLY A LEPER CAME AND KNELT BEFORE HIM, SAYING, "LORD, IF YOU ARE WILLING, YOU CAN MAKE ME CLEAN." JESUS REACHED OUT HIS HAND AND TOUCHED THE MAN. "I AM WILLING," HE SAID. "BE CLEAN!" AND IMMEDIATELY HIS LEPROSY WAS CLEANSED.

MATTHEW 8:2



Glenn offering the Vote of Thanks at the Graduation Mass



JOURNEY OF HOPE



Apparition Hill, Medjugorje May 2023

by Mina Mihas

Almost 20 years ago a dream of Jesus knocking on my door reignited the flickering ember of my faith, beckoning me to return to God and leading me to encounter His transformative love and mercy.

It was during my journey back to Him that I developed an interest in Marian apparitions, particularly one said to be unfolding to this very day in a humble village in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a place called Medjugorje, and since then a desire to visit has nestled deep within my heart. However, amidst life's ever-changing currents, the prospect of visiting always seemed just beyond my grasp.

And then this past February, just when my life was completely upended, it seemed the

Divine Mother herself had intervened, orchestrating a convergence of events that led me to finally make the pilgrimage.

During the long plane trip, the stories I'd heard about miraculous healings and conversions occupied my thoughts, and 24 hours later as we approached St James Church, my heart was filled with anticipation, and a touch of disbelief. Stepping out of the bus the beauty of the natural surroundings was already hinting at the spiritual experience that awaited me and as I thanked God for bringing me there, I felt the unmistakable presence of Our Lady as if she had been waiting for me to arrive.



“Stepping out of the bus the beauty of the natural surroundings was already hinting at the spiritual experience that awaited me and as I thanked God for bringing me there, I felt the unmistakable presence of Our Lady as if she had been waiting for me to arrive.”

There is something undeniably special about this place. Pilgrims from all corners of the globe fill the streets, each person carrying their own hopes, dreams, and intentions. It was humbling to be counted among them, all of us united by hope and a desire to encounter Jesus. Many in our group reported witnessing the Miracle of the Sun, a phenomenon that defies explanation and deepens the faith of countless believers. The sun appears to dance, spin, and emit vibrant colours, leaving observers in awe of this miraculous display.



Yet, for me, the miracles were found in simple, subtle ways, among the throngs of pilgrims seeking spiritual solace, in the quiet moments of reflection, the gentle touch of the breeze, and the heartfelt conversations and prayers shared with fellow seekers. In these seemingly ordinary encounters, I sensed the presence of God and the power of His Holy Spirit.

In the coming days, I immersed myself in the rhythm of the town, participating in prayer, attending Mass and adoration, and spending quiet moments of reflection in the sanctuary of my heart but the highlight was climbing Mt Krizevac.

As I began the ascent up Cross Mountain, each step felt imbued with intention and purpose. My pockets were weighed down with stones I had collected at the base of the mountain, one for each person close to my heart. The weight of those stones served as a poignant reminder of the burdens I carried and the hopes I held for those I love.



Mina (seated) during Stations of the Cross on Mt Krizevac

As I reached the summit, I placed each stone in a pile at the foot of the cross. I sat down, closed my eyes, and began to talk to God. I poured out my heart to Him and amidst the stillness and all-encompassing presence of the cross, I felt a deep sense of peace and assurance. As if God's ear was tenderly attentive to every word and emotion, comforting me in my vulnerability and holding my heart with boundless love.

In that intimate communion with God, I experienced a profound sense of release and surrender and as I descended the mountain, the anxiety that weighed heavily upon my soul was gently lifted, and the weight of my troubles was replaced with the promise of hope.

As I reflect upon my journey, I see God's hand throughout my life's chapters. Calling me to the Healing ministry, guiding me towards a prayer group, a new parish, and the transformative Areté course, and now, in the moment of my greatest need, an invitation to find solace in Medjugorje. These sequential milestones, divinely arranged, have equipped me to serve Him and to confront the unexpected trials that now test my faith. I find comfort in knowing that each step I take is guided by Jesus and His profound calling that reverberated through my heart two decades ago.

ON OPEN WATERS

by Melanie Dooner

Recently, a 2023 student asked me how I approached my Areté Program year.

The response I gave was, "I threw myself into it".

I remember at the end of 2020 when I enrolled, I instinctively knew this program would transform my life and challenge me. With my eyes and heart wide open, I fully expected that God would do marvellous things in me through it if I gave Him my wholehearted "yes".

True to my present understanding of God's love for me, he showed up!

At that stage in my life, I wasn't as aware as I am now of God's continual action in my life and in my circumstances. I wasn't as aware as I am now of the importance of cultivating a close relationship with God through prayer. And it wasn't as clear to me then as it is now that I am a beloved daughter of God and a woman gifted by the Holy Spirit to serve the Lord and His Church.

My experience at Areté in 2021 gave me more awareness of all these things and more - it taught me how to harness personal and spiritual discovery and share it with others in my journey as a missionary leader in our Church today. In doing so, it was able to teach me how to serve my family, my fellow parishioners, and the people our parish seeks to reach out to.

At Areté, we talk about being Missionary Leaders with 'Sails' and 'Oars' and with 'Excellence', or human flourishing (literally, Areté).

With Sails...

One of the most powerful and lasting experiences for me during the Program in 2021 was a moment of encounter in prayer during Intensive 2.



Mt Carmel Retreat Centre, Varroville

After learning about lectio divina and Ignatian imaginative prayer during the retreat, I reflected on a passage from Zephaniah that had been given to me during a ministry session earlier that evening.

'The Lord delights in you' took on a new meaning for me. The God of our universe, of the stars and moon, the God of heaven and earth, who I believed in in theory and knowledge, was my heavenly Father and actually delighted in me. Me!

Such is the power of an encounter. When God speaks into my heart in a moment when I am most open to hear, feel, and believe it, it is mysterious and stunning in its beauty.

Yes, Areté gave me sails - it gave me what I needed at that time to allow the Holy Spirit to work healing in my heart.



Melanie Dooner at the Divine Renovation Conference, Sydney

With Oars...

I enjoyed everything about the lectures. After years of teaching high school and going to university, the Areté Certificate provided me with the knowledge and skills I yearned for at a pace and level I could handle as a mother and employee.

I thrived on learning about the cultural context of faith and of our church in Australia today. I loved talking to other people with a heart for mission and evangelisation, and I loved meeting the people I met and the new friends I made.

My insatiable appetite for learning was satisfied, but I was surprised to find that one of my most lasting learnings was from semester 2, which covered human and practical aspects of ministry. I still use what I learnt that semester about time management, vulnerability and crucial conversations in my ministry.

Yes, Areté gave me a stronger understanding of how to use my oars more skillfully for the building of the church.

As Areté taught me, it is in navigating my human effort with the power of the Holy Spirit, or 'Sails and Oars,' or *Velis et Remis*, that I can be a missionary leader who can help others encounter Jesus.

With Excellence...

As a recovering perfectionist I found it easy to mistake this part of the Areté Centre mission. As I immersed myself in the program in 2021, I learnt that 'Excellence' isn't about perfection at all, it isn't even about trying as hard as I can.

Excellence the Areté way is learning to live my life given over wholly to God while allowing the Holy Spirit to make the best of what I offer of myself to better our world, our church, and to make Jesus known to others.

As Areté taught me, it is in navigating my human effort with the power of the Holy Spirit, or 'Sails and Oars,' or *Velis et Remis*, that I can be a missionary leader who can help others encounter Jesus.

And for this I am thankful.

Thats a Wrap for 2023!

By Laura Neeson

In a resounding crescendo, the Areté Centre's Class of 2023 bid farewell to a year of profound growth, leadership exploration, and spiritual transformation during their final intensive weekend.

This weekend captured the essence of their journey, and was filled with practical insights and heartfelt reflections.

Daniel Ang and Selina Hasham delved into the practical elements of Parish Renewal and Communications. Their engaging sessions provided students with actionable insights, empowering them to navigate the challenges of parish renewal with intention and purpose.

During the small group sessions, mentee groups reflected on the year gone by. These intimate discussions allowed students to distill their learnings, share personal growth stories, and forge deeper connections with each other.

As the sun set on Saturday night, students joined together in a time of prayer and ministry where the tangible presence of the Holy Spirit was felt by all.

This was followed by a joyous celebration supper, marking the completion of an extraordinary year.

On the final morning, the group made a pilgrimage to the Cross for one last reflection led by Fr Chris. He encouraged them to return to their respective worlds, armed with all the gifts gained during their Areté journey, to live out the Areté motto - *Velis et Remis* (with sail and oars).



After their final commissioning Mass and amidst the farewells, the Class of 2023 departed with gratitude, resilience, and a profound commitment to bring the Areté mission to life.

We wish all of our extraordinary 2023 students the very best and look forward to celebrating Graduation together in February 2024.





The Class of 2023 departed with gratitude, resilience, and a profound commitment to being catalysts of positive change in their communities.



Unwrapping the Joy of Catholic Christmas: 4 Fun Facts

As Christmas approaches, the warmth of festive lights and the melodies of timeless carols fill the air. Beyond the presents and feasts, the Christmas season brings a blend of traditions that many of us have come to love. Let's unwrap the joy with these 4 popular Christmas traditions.



The shrine at the site in Greccio, Italy, where St. Francis made the first Nativity scene.

1 The First Christmas Carol

Did you know that one of the first known Christmas hymns is "Jesus Refulsit Omnium" ("Jesus, Light of All the Nations")? It was written by St. Hilary of Poitiers in the fourth century. The second is "Corde natus ex Parentis" ("Of the Father's Love Begotten"), composed by Catholic poet Prudentius, also in the fourth century.

2 The Origin of Nativity Scenes

St. Francis of Assisi is credited with creating the first Nativity scene in 1223. Seeking a tangible way to convey the story of Christ's birth, St. Francis set up a manger with hay and live animals in a cave in Greccio, Italy. This simple yet profound idea has since become a cherished tradition worldwide.

3 Midnight Mass Tradition

Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve has deep roots in Catholic tradition. This solemn celebration is believed to have originated in the fourth century, symbolising the anticipation and the moment of Christ's birth. Today, Catholics around the world gather at midnight to commemorate the Saviour's arrival.

4 The 12 Days of Christmas

Contrary to the popular belief that the 12 days of Christmas precede December 25th, they actually begin on Christmas Day and continue until the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6th. This period symbolises the journey of the Magi to visit the newborn Jesus, emphasising the significance of gift-giving.



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