



## Rite Questions: Christmas 2023 falls on Monday: what Masses ought a parish celebrate—and which Masses are the faithful obliged to attend—during the previous weekend?

**A:** After Sunday, the “primordial holy day of obligation” (Canon 1247), the Code of Canon Law lists 10 Holy Days of Obligation: “the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Epiphany, the Ascension, the Body and Blood of Christ, Holy Mary the Mother of God, her Immaculate Conception, her Assumption, Saint Joseph, Saint Peter and Saint Paul the Apostles, and All Saints. Some of these may be suppressed by the local bishops’ conference (such as Sts. Peter and Paul in the United States); others can be transferred to Sunday (as is Corpus Christi in the U.S.); and still others can be added to the list (such as St. Patrick in Ireland).

Another exception allows for a bishops’ conference to lift the obligation to attend Mass on a Holy Day when it falls on a Saturday or Monday (such as Mary, Mother of God on Monday, January 1, 2024, in the United States). The obligation to attend Mass on Christmas, however, is *never* abrogated, regardless of the day of the week. Consequently, the faithful are obliged to attend Mass for the Fourth Sunday of Advent—which is also never abrogated—and for Christmas Day. One Mass does not fulfill two obligations (see Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy *Newsletter*, February 2017, 5-6, for more information).

But *which* Masses the faithful attend allows for some curious leeway. The Norms on the Liturgical Year and Calendar and its Table of Liturgical Days envisions a parish schedule of Masses this upcoming Christmas along these lines:

- Saturday, December 23: Evening Mass for the Fourth Sunday of Advent
- Sunday, December 24: Morning Masses for the Fourth Sunday of Advent; Evening Masses for the Solemnity of Christmas
- Monday, December 25: Morning and Daytime Masses for the Solemnity of Christmas.

The Code of Canon Law, however, simply states that “A person who assists at a Mass celebrated anywhere in a Catholic rite either on the feast day itself or in the evening of the preceding day satisfies the obligation of participating in the Mass” (Can. 1248 §1). In other words, the laity’s only obligation is to attend Mass twice, but not necessarily one Mass with readings and orations for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, and a second Mass using readings and prayers for the Solemnity of Christmas (although this would be ideal). For example, one could conceivably attend the first Mass on Sunday afternoon to fulfill the obligation for the Fourth Sunday of Advent (even though this Mass would celebrate the Vigil of Christmas) and attend Midnight Mass to fulfill the Christmas obligation.

In any case, parishes will follow the norms of the liturgical calendar, with Christmas Vigil beginning the evening of December 24, and parishioners will follow the requirements expressed in Canon 1248 of the Code of Canon Law. Hopefully, these two criteria will parallel each other closely for celebrations reflective of the heart of the birth of Christ.

—Answered by the Editors of *ADOREMUS* (September 2023)

<https://adoremus.org/2023/09/rite>