

**Traveling With
Mary and Joseph**
Praying las Posadas

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Introduction

The Bible mentions the travels of countless personalities: Abram and Sarai left Ur and set out for Canaan. The people of Israel traveled from slavery in Egypt to a new life and identity in the Promised Land. Elijah walked (or ran, rather) to escape the army of Jezebel, who wanted him killed. Joseph and Mary traveled, too. According to Saint Matthew, they went to Bethlehem for the census, where God provided them shelter as God had provided shelter for their ancestors. And the Second Vatican Council evoked strong biblical images when it called the Catholic Church a “pilgrim Church” (*Lumen Gentium* 48).

Latinos experience God here and now. They know God travels with them whether they are migrants from Mexico thinning beets in Colorado, dishwashers from Guatemala in St. Louis, gardeners from Venezuela in Chicago, or garment workers from Ecuador in New York. For nine days before Christmas, Latinos remember the journey of Joseph and Mary as they searched for lodging (*posada*) in Bethlehem. Throughout small pueblos and in the neighborhoods of large cities, Latinos relive the anxiety of the holy couple. They also add prayers for their loved ones who have made a trip to the north in search of a better life. *Las Posadas* is a touching ceremony that can help Christians today see the real needs of those who live without the security of health insurance, a steady job, or a loving family.

This adapted version of *las Posadas* was written to help make Advent a more intense period of reflection on the God who has a “preferential option for the poor.” It can be used to begin a meal and can provide some

focus for the meal conversation, if people are willing.

May this novena stir hearts to make room for those who travel and do not know what they will eat or where they will sleep tonight.

Las Posadas

Each night, two people dressed as Mary and Joseph are joined by a small band of followers sometimes dressed as shepherds. They meet at a designated spot, usually the church, where the procession begins. While walking to the first house, the rosary is usually recited and religious songs sung. A reverent, solemn atmosphere is expected, if not always achieved.

The drama occurs when Joseph and Mary knock on the door and, in a song, ask for a room. Outside with the couple is a choir that joins them in their request. Inside is another choir that turns them away, telling them to look elsewhere; they are unknown and might even be robbers. Some groups then gather for

Scripture sharing and prayer. This scenario continues each night until December 24, when Joseph and Mary are welcomed inside and given food and lodging.

This tradition is not a folksy reenactment of Joseph and Mary's search for lodging, but instead a solemn dramatization made by women and men who believe God searches with them. Nine days before Christmas, Latinos from Yakima, Washington, to Osceola, Iowa, to Copándaro, Michoacán, and beyond will remember how God, as promised, remains a faithful companion.

Common Prayer

(Recite after Scripture reading)

Jesus, we come to you on behalf of our brothers and sisters who wander far from home and experience the life of immigrants. They include refugees fleeing violence and families escaping poverty, all searching for a better life. Not knowing where to go, they need your assistance. You yourself know full