

## **Misa de Gallo or Misa de Aguinaldo – What’s the difference?**

The Filipinos’ way of celebrating Christmas is made unique by their attendance at nine dawn masses preceding December 25, the Lord’s Nativity, which is the most joyous day in the Christmas calendar. Many call the mass misa de gallo and others call it misa de aguinaldo.

Some observers say the cock also crows at midnight and therefore the Christmas eve mass should be called misa de gallo. Others say the mass speaks of the birth of Christ who is God’s greatest gift to man, so it should be called misa de aguinaldo.

What’s the difference? And which is the correct term?

### **Interchangeable**

Today, the terms are used interchangeably to refer to the dawn (or nine-day novena) masses or the Christmas Eve or midnight mass. Way back in 1565 when Jesus’ nativity was first celebrated as a feast, misas de aguinaldo (or gift masses) were said to start on December 16.

These dawn masses coincided with the harvest season when farmers had to wake up at dawn. “As an accommodation, the masses were moved up to four o’clock in the morning,” writes Alejandro R. Roces, author of Fiesta.

“So powerful is the tradition that to this day, urban residents attend misas de aguinaldo without questioning why they attend Mass at such an ungodly hour...In some communities, the parish priest goes as far as banging on each and every door...” he says.

Towards the latter part of the 18th century, Spanish missionaries used to visit far-flung villages more often during the Christmas season than any time of the year. They witnessed how the natives rejoiced over their rich harvest. The priests thought it wouldn’t be a bad idea to invite the farmers and their families to a thanksgiving mass. Since the farmers walked to the fields at the break of dawn to gather their harvest, the mass had to be held at that early hour.

Since time immemorial, great Church feasts have been preceded by a novena – the thanksgiving masses preceding the great feast of the Lord’s Nativity had to be held the novena way.

The mass began to be called misa de gallo because it is at dawn, about 4 A.M., that the cock (gallo in Spanish) usually crows.

### **Theology of the mass**

A lay religious writer says, however, that the Church’s book of feasts and masses throughout the year has always called the dawn masses misas de aguinaldo, because theologians believe that the thanksgiving mass transcends the limits of time.

The dawn mass, therefore, is held in adoration or thanksgiving for a rich harvest (or for any blessing for that matter) and Christ himself is God’s supreme gift present at the altar during Mass.

It would appear that if one prefers to cite the time of celebration, he may call the novena masses misas de gallo, and misas de aguinaldo if the theology of the mass is considered. (The Church, however, has always referred to them as misas de aguinaldo.)

But, what’s in a name, quipped the late Msgr. Jose Abriol, the Tagalog translator of the Bible and a great Church intellectual. “It’s the same mass anyway. It’s not the cock or gift of harvest that is of importance, but Christ who as God’s gift was born at the time the cock crowed.”

Ref.: <http://www.mb.com.ph/misa-de-gallo-or-misa-de-aguinaldo-whats-the-difference/>

**Look also here: [www.christmas.philippineculture.ph](http://www.christmas.philippineculture.ph)**