



Saint John Paul II Parish

469 SHATTUCK ROAD | SAGINAW, MICHIGAN | 48604

Saturday 4:00 PM



Sunday 9:30 AM

We, as the Body of Christ, in the faith community of Saint John Paul II, built on our combined histories and cultural diversity, are called to “open wide the doors to Christ” through evangelization, stewardship, and vibrant worship.

Weekday Liturgies

Wednesday & Friday at 8:30 AM
Tuesday at 6:30 PM (per bulletin)

Sacramental Penance

Saturday at 11:00 AM

Sacraments/Sacramental Preparation

Baptism: Contact Parish Office 3 months prior
Marriage: Contact Parish Office 6 months prior
Anointing of the Sick: Available after weekend Mass

Visitation of the Sick and Homebound

If someone in your family would like a visit or would like to receive Holy Communion please contact the Parish Office.

Sister Christine A. Gretka, CSJ
PASTORAL ADMINISTRATOR

Reverend James Wm. Bessert
SACRAMENTAL MINISTER

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Patrick Portner
MUSIC MINISTRY
PRINCIPAL ACCOMPANIST

Drew Derosier
MAINTENANCE

Ed Green
MAINTENANCE

CONTACT INFORMATION

Parish Office (989) 755-0828
Parish Office Fax (989) 755-4943
Parish House (989) 753-2497

OFFICE HOURS

Monday - Thursday 8:30 AM - 4:00 PM
Friday closed

OFFICE LOCATION & MAILING ADDRESS

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“Open Wide the Doors to Christ”

The Fourth Sunday of Advent is in a unique position on the Liturgical Calendar this year. It lasts less than a day. By late afternoon or early Sunday evening, the Church will celebrate the *Vigil of the Nativity of the Lord*. Later, *Mass During the Night* will take place here at 7:00 PM. On Christmas Day, at 9:30 AM, we will celebrate the *Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord* with the Scripture Readings for *Mass During the Day*. For pastors, pastoral administrators, priest presiders, musicians, and liturgical ministers, these days will be a kind of liturgical marathon. For the remainder of us, it will mean planning carefully to celebrate both Advent and Christmas by attending more than one Mass this weekend. Please join us for whichever Masses suit you and your family best. Your presence does make a difference in our festive celebration of the Eucharist.

Mary is the key figure in the Gospel passage from Luke for this Fourth Sunday of Advent. We hear the familiar story of the Angel Gabriel announcing to her that she will conceive and bear a Son that she is to name Jesus who will be called the Son of the Most High. Can you imagine her mixed emotions of amazement, confusion, fear, and total trust in God? At the end of her conversation with the angel, Mary simply says “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Because of her yes, God worked marvelous things through her. She bore to the world the Son of God who changed our lives forever. Like Mary, we, too, are asked to bring the Son of God into our world which longs for wholeness, healing, hope, inspiration, a spiritual presence and direction. Our world needs to know and experience the Savior among us. Jesus came for all people for all time. We are his body who can make a difference, beginning in our homes, at work, in our parish, and in our community. Let us reflect upon what God is asking of us this Christmas? Like Mary, are we able to say “yes” to letting the world see the face of God in its midst?

This past week, James Callahan, a member of our parish and of the Knights of Columbus, presented me with a very generous donation. It was a check amounting to \$1,230.00 from the K of C Breakfast sponsored for our parish last Sunday. I am most grateful to the Knights for their generosity. I thank all of you who attended the breakfast. We had a great showing of parishioners. Chuck Pappas has been doing a great job overseeing the breakfasts this year. When you have the opportunity, please extend a thank you to the Knights of Columbus for all their charitable works and for all they do to support our parishes.

Have a Blessed and Joyful Christmas!
Sister Chris Gretka, CSJ

A Prayer for Christmas

**Child of Bethlehem,
grant that we may share with all our hearts
in this profound mystery of Christmas,
Put into our hearts this peace
for which we sometimes seek so desperately
and which you alone can give us.
Help us know one another better,
and live as brothers and sisters,
children of the same Father.
Reveal to us also
your beauty, holiness, and purity.
Awaken in our hearts love and gratitude
for your infinite goodness.
Join us all together in your love,
and give us your heavenly peace. Amen.**

- Pope Saint John XXIII

Stewardship

CATHOLIC SERVICES APPEAL 2017
245/398 Pledges Received

Total Assessment:	\$46,716.00
Total Pledged:	\$36,945.00
% of Assessment Pledged:	79.08%
% of Households Pledged:	61.55%

Thank you for your generosity.

STEWARDSHIP REPORT FOR DECEMBER 17, 2017

Sunday Collection	\$	5,348.00
Collection Needed Each Week		6,300.00
Budget Year to Date		157,600.00
Actual Year to Date		140,612.00

STEWARDSHIP MESSAGE

God promises King David that his house and his kingdom will endure forever. It is through Mary’s “Yes” – “I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say.” – that the promise finds fulfillment.

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR THE WEEK:

Monday: Is. 52:7-10; Heb. 1:1-6; Jn. 1:1-18
Tuesday: Acts. 6:8-10, 7:54-59; Mt. 10:17-22
Wednesday: 1 Jn. 1:1-4; Jn. 20:1A, 2-8
Thursday: 1 Jn. 1:5-2:2; Mt. 2:13-18
Friday: 1 Jn. 2:3-11; Lk. 2:22-35
Saturday: 1 Jn. 2:12-17; Lk. 2:36-40
Sunday: Sir. 3:2-6, 12-14; Col. 3:12-21;
 Lk. 2:22-40

WE HAVE BEEN ASKED TO PRAY FOR

Caroline Macek Catherine Wells
 Theresa Zajac

THANK YOU

Thank you to all who helped us celebrate our Mother’s life, Father Jim, Sister Chris, altar servers, readers, musicians, and those who offered condolences. Mom’s funeral Mass and Vigil service brought great comfort to us.

We are also very grateful for the delicious luncheon prepared for us. Thank you cooks, servers, and those who contributed the amazing desserts. Mom would have been pleased.

God bless you all,
 Mary, June, and Joe
 The Family of Dorothy Zabelski

CATHOLIC WOMEN’S FELLOWSHIP

All women from around the diocese are invited to gather once a month at the Center for Ministry for prayer, faith formation, guest presenters, discussion, and fellowship. Our next meeting is on **Thursday, January 4** at 6:00 PM. We welcome Father Andy LaFramboise for a presentation on Saint John Paul II and the Family. No registration needed – just come!

WINTER WEATHER POLICY

When Carrollton Public Schools are closed due to inclement weather, the Parish Office is closed and all parish events are canceled. That refers to: Faith Formation Classes, Council and Commission Meetings, Rosary Altar Society Meetings, Movie Night, etc. **PLEASE NOTE THAT EVEN WHEN CARROLLTON SCHOOLS ARE CLOSED, MASS OR PRAYER WILL STILL TAKE PLACE WITH ANY WHO GATHER ON THOSE DAYS.** Please use your best judgment in determining whether or not to travel to church on days when there is heavy snow or ice warning. First and foremost, be safe.

DAILY PRAYER & LITURGICAL MINISTER SCHEDULE

DECEMBER 26 **NO EVENING MASS**

DECEMBER 27 **NO MORNING MASS**
FEAST OF SAINT JOHN

DECEMBER 28 **NO LITURGY OF THE WORD WITH COMMUNION**
FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS

DECEMBER 29 **MORNING MASS – 8:30 AM, FRIDAY**
 Sacristan: Margaret Gonzales
 Server: Jim Haley
 Lector: Kathy Doyle
 EM of Holy: Sue Haley,
 Communion: Ruth Gomez

DECEMBER 30 **NO CONFESSION**

DECEMBER 30 **VIGIL: THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY,**
AND JOSEPH – 4:00 PM
 Sacristan: Deb Popielarz
 Altar Servers: Andrew Kontur,
 Matthew Kontur, Sister Chris
 Barbara Taylor, Pat Wachowicz
 Lectors: *Carole Inman, Judy Rugenstein,*
 EM of Holy: Bessie Keller, Ruth Gomez,
 Communion: Rita Kontur, LouAnn Rivette,
 Joan Kruske, Elaine Schnepf
 Ministers of: Jim Szynwelski*, Sharon DeLong,
 Hospitality: Bill Harrison, Bob White,
 Pat Gilginas+, Margie Black+

DECEMBER 31 **THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY,**
AND JOSEPH - 9:30 AM
 Sacristan: Juanita Hadley
 Altar Servers: Matthew Gembrowski,
 Austin St. Souver, Matthew Portner
 Ed Green, Karen St. Souver
 Lectors: *Judy LaVigne, Lisa Del Valle,*
 EM of Holy: Sheila Dupuis, Amy Dupuis,
 Communion: Connie Castañon, Sharon Gembrowski,
 Barb Green, Sister Chris
 Ministers of: Jerry Schmidt*, Gary Sobek,
 Hospitality: Judy Plowdrey, Jim Plowdrey,
 Tammy Dupuis+

Hospital Ministry: Sue Haley

Parish Office Hours:	Christmas Season
Monday, December 25	Parish Office Closed
Tuesday, December 26	Parish Office Closed
Wednesday, December 27	8:30 AM – Noon
Thursday, December 28	8:30 AM – Noon
Friday, December 29	Parish Office Closed
Monday, January 1	Parish Office Closed
Tuesday, January 2	Parish Office Closed
Wednesday, January 3	8:30 AM – Noon
Thursday, January 4	8:30 AM – Noon

**CHRISTMAS MASS SCHEDULE
SAINT JOHN PAUL II PARISH**

Sunday, December 24 **7:00 PM**
Christmas Eve Mass
Caroling begins at 6:30 PM

Monday, December 25 **9:30 AM**
Christmas Day Mass
Caroling begins at 9:15 AM

*You may be interested in knowing about the following
Mass times in our Vicariate:*

Christmas Eve Mass **4:30 PM**
Christ the Good Shepherd Parish

Midnight Mass with Bishop Cistone
Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption



LITURGICAL MINISTER SCHEDULE

DECEMBER 24 **VIGIL: THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD - 7:00 PM**
Sacristan: Judy LaVigne
Incense: Matthew Gembrowski
Altar Servers: Peter Gembrowski,
David Kontur, Andrew Kontur
Lectors: Greg Klenk, Rita Kontur
EM of Holy Communion: *Juanita Hadley, Lisa Del Valle,*
Ed Popielarz, Deb Popielarz,
Karen St. Souver, Elaine Schnepf,
Sharon Gembrowski, Ed Green
Ministers of Hospitality: Jim Szynwelski*, Darren St. Souver,
Jerry Schmidt, Bessie Keller,
Carole Inman, Henry Hadley

DECEMBER 25 **THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD - 9:30 AM**
Sacristan: Ann Wamback
Incense: Matthew Gembrowski
Altar Servers: Chuck Pappas,
Savannah Bruske, Tara Bruske,
Lectors: Kathy Doyle, Sister Chris
EM of Holy Communion: *Margaret Gonzales, Tori Little,*
Jerilyn Burke, Connie Castañon,
Sheila Dupuis, Pat Wachowicz,
Jenny Brissette
Ministers of Hospitality: Jerry Schmidt*, Joe Wamback,
Tammy Dupuis, Darlene Warner,
Ralph Gonzales, Nick Cronkright

Fourth Sunday of Advent B 2

Romans 16:25-27

A Great Ending

A good story has a great ending. It features good characters, a fanciful setting, and an interesting plot with a good share of twists. But it needs an ending that pulls everything together—sometimes with a surprise.

God has written a good story with a great ending. The story appeared not in a few chapters, but in thousands of years of human history. For all those generations, people were waiting on God to fulfill a promise. They believed in their hearts that one day God would deliver, but they did not know when or how.

The ending of the story was the beginning of Christianity: the birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus entered human history as our Messiah. He was not what believers were expecting—he seemed like less, yet he was much more. He seemed like a mere vulnerable human, born in poverty, killed in dishonor. But he was more. He was the Son of God, born human like each of us, crucified for our sins—and risen from the dead.

St. Paul says God kept this mystery secret for long ages, like the surprise ending to a good book. The prophets gave clues to what the ending would be, but God revealed it much later in time. God made this good news known not just to the children of the covenant—the people who were reading the book—but to all the nations of the world. The God who did that, Paul says, deserves our praise.

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FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT



Find Us Ready

Good and gracious God,
who sent the angel Gabriel to announce the
gift of your Son,
your love for us has no limits and
endures forever.

As we prepare for the coming of Christ,
eliminate within us all sin and fear,
giving us pure hearts to receive him.
May the Holy Spirit fill us with your grace,

just as Mary was so filled,
and find us ready to stand in your presence
to serve you.

Keep us faithful to the covenant you made
with our ancestors.
May your joy saturate our beings as we go
forth proclaiming your salvation,
so that, on that final day, we will forever sing
your goodness.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sunday, December 24, 2017

Mystery Revealed

Today's Readings: 2 Samuel 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16; Psalm 89:2–3, 4–5, 27, 29; Romans 16:25–27; Luke 1:26–38. The readings proclaimed at the liturgy today invite us to ponder the mystery revealed in the birth of Christ. David wishes to build a proper house for the ark of God. The prophet Nathan reveals that God has a much bigger plan: to establish a house for him. God will build up the nation to prosper until the end of time. Because of the Incarnation, we are heirs to this promise and are members of God's household. As the psalm states, God has made a covenant with his people and we continue the song of praise and thanksgiving.

This promise cannot be fulfilled without Mary's yes. Since the time of the fall, all creation has waited for Mary. God chose her to bear his Son, the Messiah who establishes

the Reign of God. Have you ever been in a situation where you had to give up everything (die to self) for another, especially for God's will? Here is a young woman whose whole life changes when she humbly says, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Tomorrow, the Christian world celebrates the birth of Jesus. The season of Christmas, challenges us to grow deeper in faith. Jesus reveals the Father's love and mercy. At every liturgy, the Church celebrates this mystery and receives the presence of God's own Son. We are to become what we receive—the Body of Christ. Take time today to reflect on your yes and see in what ways God has revealed himself to you.



THIS WEEK AT HOME

Monday, December 25

Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord

Today's psalm captures the importance of this solemnity in the life of the world. The psalmist sings a song of praise for the mighty deeds God has done. As Christians, we celebrate God's gift of the Incarnation, which has made salvation known; all creation blesses God's holy name. During dinner tonight, read and reflect on the story of Christ's birth. *Today's Readings: Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18.*

Tuesday, December 26

Feast of St. Stephen

Have you ever thought about what it would be like to be a martyr? In his martyrdom, Stephen teaches us to remain fervent and faithful in our commitment to Christ. Although it is not always easy to keep our baptismal promises, we must trust, as Jesus says, that the Spirit will speak through us. Practicing a regular prayer life will help us remain faithful. Take time today to pray for those who continue to be persecuted for their faith; research one modern martyr. *Today's Readings: Acts of the Apostles 6:8-10; 7:54-59; Psalm 31:3cd-4, 6 and 8ab, 16bc and 17; Matthew 10:17-22.*

Wednesday, December 27

St. John

The word *witness* is a good summary for the readings today. Because of the encounter that the disciples and Mary Magdalene had with Christ, they were compelled to share the Word of life. John is willing to give his life for Christ. In Baptism, each of us is intimately woven into the life of God and therefore, we, like the early disciples, must witness to our encounter with the Risen Christ. Everything we are and do must proclaim Christ, who is life. Like John, take time today to write your "gospel," the story of your encounter with Christ. *Today's Readings: 1 John 1:1-4; Psalm 97:1-2, 5-6, 11-12; John 20:1a and 2-8.*

Thursday, December 28

Feast of the Holy Innocents

Today the Church commemorates the life of those children who were executed by Herod. During this short Christmas cycle, martyrdom is highlighted, as the feasts of Sts. Stephen and John are also celebrated. In the Middle Ages, these early martyrs were known as companions of Christ. Their stories invite us to reflect on the effect of the Incarnation. Christ is the one who frees us from all bondage and saves us from death. Martyrdom is a profession of deep faith in Christ. Let your prayer today be for all who have been executed for the sake of Christ. *Today's Readings: 1 John 1:5-2:2; Psalm 124:2-3, 4-5, 7cd and 8; Matthew 2:13-18.*

Friday, December 29

Light

The birth of Christ revealed God's greatest gift to the universe. He truly is the Light of the World, the one who brings us out of darkness. John tells us that those who love and remain in love will have the light. Simeon, in the Gospel, tells us that Jesus is the light that will reveal God's love and mercy to the world. At Baptism, each of us received a lighted candle to remind us that Christ's light is in us, and that we are called to share that light in acts of love. Light your baptismal candle today. *Today's Readings: 1 John 2:3-11; Psalm 96:1-2a, 2b-3, 5b-6; Luke 2:22-35.*

Saturday, December 30

God's Will

"Do not love the world or the things in the world" is a key message in today's First Reading. John reminds us that we know God and God is within us. Yet we are often enticed by the ideals of this world, and we can easily be misdirected. We must listen to the voice of love within us. God calls us to share the Good News and live according to his will. Listening in prayer helps us remain confident in our vocation. Make a list of those times you have ignored God and then offer them in prayer. *Today's Readings: 1 John 2:12-17; Psalm 96:7-8a, 8b-9, 10; Luke 2:36-40.*





OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SAGINAW

5800 Weiss Street | Saginaw, Michigan 48603-2762
Phone: (989) 797-6615 | FAX: (989) 799-7912

Christmas, 2017

Dear Friends in Christ,

There is a legend which tells of a wise and good king who loved his people. He wanted to know of their hardships and how they lived. The king would often dress in the clothes of a worker or beggar to visit the homes of the poor. No one had the slightest idea who he was.

One day, he visited a poor man who lived in a dark and dingy cellar. He ate the same bland food the poor man ate but spoke cheerful and kind words to him. Then the king quietly left. Weeks later, he visited the poor man again and revealed to him his identity by saying: *"I am your king!"* The king thought the man would surely ask for some gift or money or favor; but, he did not. Instead, he said to the king: *"You left your palace and your glory to visit me in this dark, dreary place. You ate the same stale food I eat. Most of all, you brought joy to my heart! To others, you may have shared your riches. To me, you have given yourself."*

God, our Lord and King, has visited His people and continues to visit us each day. He gives Himself to us in the person of His only Son, Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate and who brings us words of joy and encouragement.

I extend to each of you a heartfelt greeting of love and appreciation. To those of you who, for whatever reason, have not felt drawn to Mass or the Sacraments for quite some time, I invite you to return to the Church so that you may know and celebrate more deeply the Lord's presence in your lives.

May our Lord continue to bless you, your families and loved ones; and, may Mary, Mother of the Child Jesus and our Mother, watch over you always.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bishop Cistone". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend Joseph R. Cistone
Bishop of Saginaw

THE CHRISTMAS CAROLS WE SING

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

This hymn was written by Charles Wesley, one of the most prolific of all hymn writers. He and his brother John founded the Methodist Movement in England. Their hymns were used not only to direct worshippers' hearts to God, but also to teach the truth of the Gospel.

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing helps answer the questions: Who is Jesus Christ? Why was he born? The first verse tells us that Jesus came to reconcile humanity with God. The second verse emphasizes that Jesus is the incarnate Deity: *God become flesh*. The last verse gives us the reasons why Christ was born: "light and life to all he brings," "born that we no more may die," and "born to give us second birth." That verse also helps us to understand that Christ, the Prince of Peace, and Son of Righteousness, has come to bring healing.

This joyful and hope-filled carol encompasses the whole life of Jesus, from his birth to his resurrection.

Silent Night

Sometime in January, 1819, Karl Mauracher (of Austria) came to repair the organ at Saint Nicholas Church in Oberndorf. While there, the assistant priest, Joseph Mohr, and his organist, Franz Gruber, taught Karl a song they had recently written. The song was Silent Night.

The organ at Saint Nicholas Church had broken shortly before Christmas. Since they wouldn't have an organ for Christmas Eve, Mohr and Gruber put their heads together. Mohr wrote 18 short lines of poetry which Gruber set to music for two voices, choir, and guitar. That is how "Silent Night" came to be. Had the organ been repaired by Christmas, the world's best known Christmas carol may never have been written.

Angels We Have Heard on High

This lively French Carol, *Les Anges dans Nos Campagnes*, was first published in 1855. In 1862, it was translated into English and published by James Chadwick. It is probably the best known of all the French Carols. It tells of the angelic announcement of the birth of Jesus to shepherds in a field near Bethlehem.

Scholars think that these shepherds may have been those who supplied lambs for sacrifice at the temple in nearby Jerusalem. For generations, Jewish people worshipped at the Temple. The most important ceremony was the yearly sacrifice of a lamb for the forgiveness of sin. On the night the angels appeared to the shepherds, they were called away from their regular duties in order to meet and greet the true Lamb of God. About thirty-three years later, this newborn King would make the final sacrifice and take away the sins of the whole world once and for all with his death and resurrection.

Christmas Blessings! In the name of Saint John Paul II Parish Staff, Father Jim, and myself, I pray that you and your families have a Blessed Christmas and a grace-filled Christmas Season!

Sister Chris Gretka, CSJ



Christmas Mass During the Day ABC 1

Isaiah 52:7-10

SALVATION'S EYEWITNESSES

Whenever you see something great, you can feel the excitement. Whenever you hear about something great, it just isn't the same. Travelers give eyewitness accounts of their journeys, the people they've met, the places they've seen and the events they've experienced. If something exciting happens on your street, you'll want to see it for yourself. Then you can feel the excitement.

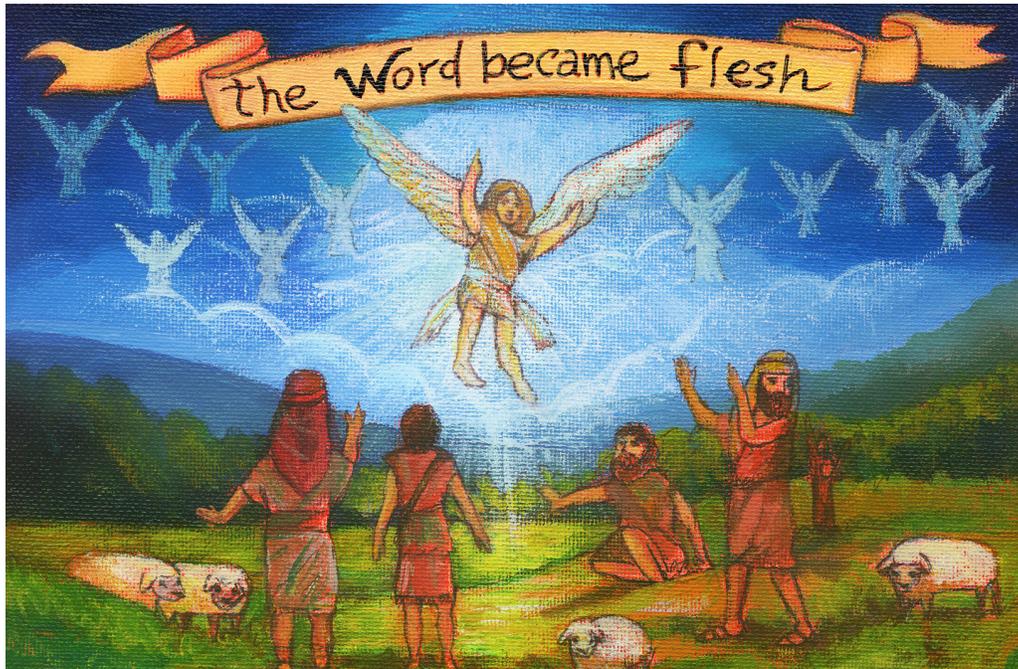
Christmas is a celebration for the eyewitnesses of salvation. We have not just heard about it. We have experienced it. We know the fulfillment of God's promises, the presence of Christ and the hope of believers. We have experienced the wonder of God in our families, our friends, our church and our community. God is redeeming people.

Isaiah says, when those announcing good news about God come to the mountain of Jerusalem, they are beautiful to behold from head to toe. Even their feet are beautiful. "They see directly, before their eyes, the LORD restoring Zion." These eyewitnesses bring back to the city the exciting reports of God's work. It is not enough for us to hear about it. We look, see and experience firsthand the marvels God has done.

This Christmas we reflect on God's action in our lives. We experience the birth of salvation within us. We know from our own experience that God saves us. When we share that good news, we are beautiful. Even our feet are beautiful.

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THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD



Awaken Your Love

Loving God,
you sent your Word to dwell among us
and reveal to us your glory.
By sending us the Light, your only Son,
you have blessed your people who once lived
in darkness.
On this great feast of the Incarnation,
we lift our voices and give you praise for your
awesome deeds.
Like your servant John the Baptist,

grant us confidence to testify to the gift of
your Son, who is our salvation.
Send us forth proclaiming the gifts of your
mercy and love,
which you revealed in your Incarnate Word,
so that, all who hear the Good News may
come to know Christ.
May we, who received the Light at Baptism,
persevere in faith, hope, and love
as we forever sing of your saving power.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Monday, December 25, 2017

Word Made Flesh



Today's Readings: Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18. On this day, all creation sings out in joy, for the Lord God has revealed to us his mighty deeds. During Advent and Christmas, it is easy to be caught up in the hype of secular society. As Christians, however, we need to reflect upon the "saving power of God" (Psalm 98). What does the Incarnation mean in your life and in the life of the Christian? Praying with Psalm 98, it becomes clear how profound God's love is for his Chosen People, and this is what we celebrate in unison with every corner of creation.

John's Gospel recounts the story of the Incarnation in an extended poetic form. Jesus, the Word become flesh, shines in the darkness and is the One who gives life. Every Sunday when we hear the Scriptures proclaimed, the Word is alive and trying to find a home in our hearts. Listen to the Word; hear the Word; allow the Word to rouse your heart to action and transform it so your life becomes a proclamation of the Good News, the Word made flesh.



THIS WEEK AT HOME

Las Posadas

Las Posadas is a nine-day Advent celebration that begins on December 16 and ends on Christmas Eve. Today, it is celebrated in many Latin American countries and has become common across the United States. Augustinian Spanish friars, who were evangelizing the New World, first brought Las Posadas to Mexico during the sixteenth century. In 1586, Pope Sixtus V issued a Papal Bull that granted permission for Christmas Masses to be celebrated the nine days preceding the solemnity of Christ's birth.

Las Posadas is intended to help participants prepare for the celebration of the birth of Christ. The novena-like celebration is a communal event that reenacts Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem. The nine days also symbolize the nine months of Mary's pregnancy. The Lucan Gospel account tells us that Mary and Joseph searched for a place to stay, but the inn (*posada*) was full. They find shelter, but not in an inn, which is how Jesus is born in the manger.

For this celebration, the community gathers during the evening with lighted candles. With two individuals portraying Mary and Joseph (and sometimes with a donkey), the group sings carols and makes their way to the first stop. The pilgrims or *peregrinos* go from place to place seeking shelter but are rejected at first by the "innkeepers." Eventually, the group arrives at the final house and is welcomed into the home, singing "Enter, Enter, Holy Pilgrims."

Once the group arrives at the final house, traditional songs, such as "Canción para pedir posada," are sung and then followed by Scripture readings and prayers. The evening concludes with a festive meal and activities for children.

This tradition, steeped in God's hospitality, reminds the participants that Christians must show hospitality to the poor and marginalized. Las Posadas can help parish communities deepen their devotion to the Holy Family. This is a festive and prayerful way to celebrate Advent and meditate on the Holy Family's journey to Bethlehem.

Simbang Gabi

Simbang Gabi is a nine-day Advent devotion that has been celebrated in the Philippines since the sixteenth century. Like Las Posadas, these "Dawn Masses," begin on December 16 and end on December 24 with the *Misa de Gallo* (Rooster's Mass). The Filipino celebration has roots in Mexico, when in 1587 the pope allowed outdoor Masses for Christmas since the celebration was too large to hold indoors.

Liturgically, these nine Masses are intended to help the community prepare their hearts and minds to receive the Christ Child at Christmas. They are also celebrated as a nine-day novena to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Tradition says that these nine days corresponded to the nine-day harvest festivals once held by the Filipino community.

During the nine days, Mass is traditionally celebrated outside in the early morning before sunrise, hence the name Rooster's Mass. This practice was intended to accommodate the farmers who could attend Mass early and then get into the fields for harvest. When the first sounds of dawn rang out, the family made their way to the church for the festivities. In the United States today, some parishes celebrate these Masses earlier in the evening to accommodate modern work schedules.

The making of decorations called *parol* is a Filipino tradition that continues today. The *parol* is a paper lantern that commemorates the Star of Bethlehem. Since these Masses were celebrated before dawn, the lanterns helped guide farmers and their families to Mass. You might consider asking the art and environment team at your parish if you and others could make *parols* and decorate the space for these liturgies. Even though it is Advent, at these Masses, because of special permissions, the priest wears white vestments and the assembly sings the "Glory to God." Other traditional songs include, "Pasko na Naman" (It's Christmas Again), and "Himig Pasko." Once the liturgy is concluded, the community continues the celebration with food and conversation. Traditional treats include *puto*, *kutsinta*, and *bibingka*. If you missed this celebration this year, mark your calendars for the coming year and take part in the festivities.





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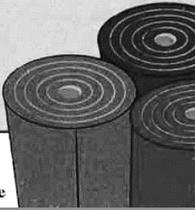
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