

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

**~ A Prayer for the Fourth Week in Advent ~**

**Lord Jesus,  
with wonder and praise  
we have gathered as a family  
to await that voice  
which announces your birth.**

**What wonders you work in our lives  
as you become human, like us.  
It is good to know  
that you walk with us every minute.  
There are so many choices we have to make,  
so many adventures ahead of each of us.**

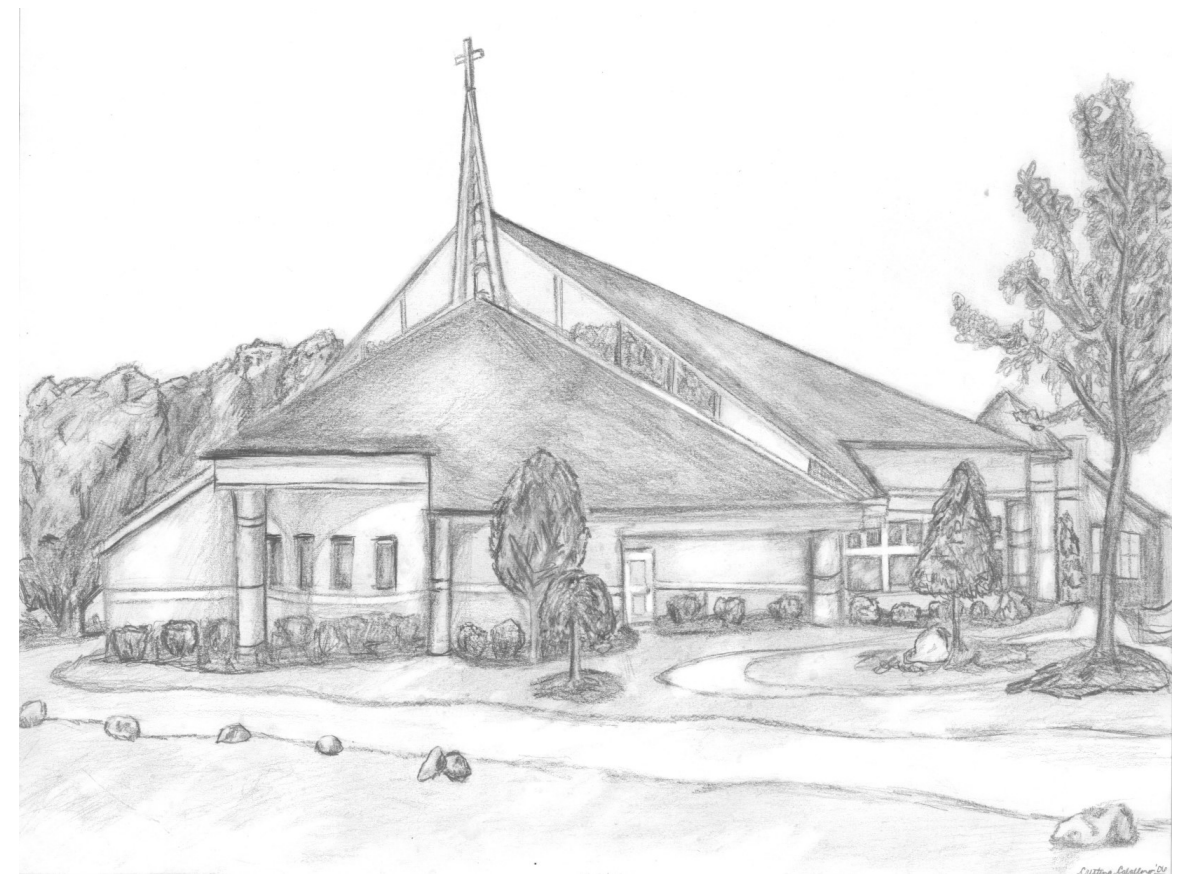
**Help us to listen well.  
What praise is yours  
as you reveal the depths of your love for us.  
Take good care of the ones we love so much  
as they walk with you  
on their own journeys.**

**Thank you for this wonderful season,  
and for the gift of sharing it with special people,  
and for letting us know you better.  
May we, like Mary, give you birth in our hearts  
all the days of our lives.  
We love you.  
Amen.**

**CAMPUS MINISTRY OFFICE:**

The Campus Ministry Office is located in **Our Lady Chapel**.  
phone: [440] 473-3560 or 216-570-9276 [cell]. e-mail: blazekj@gilmour.org

# Our Lady Chapel



*Our Lady Chapel is a Roman Catholic community founded in the love of the Father, centered in Christ, and rooted in the Holy Cross tenets of building family and embracing diversity. We are united in our journey of faith through prayer and sacrament, and we seek growth through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in liturgy and outreach, while responding to the needs of humanity.*

**MASSES FOR CHRISTMAS EVE and CHRISTMAS DAY:**

Christmas is always a very special family time of the year. You and your family are invited to join us for our Celebration of Christmas. **On Christmas Eve**, we will have a **4:00 PM** and a **6:00 PM Mass**. There will not be a 10 PM Mass this year because of COVID. **On Christmas Day, a Family Mass will be celebrated at 10:00 AM.** We pray that you and your family are truly able to celebrate the very special blessing of God which is present in the incarnate Jesus. We would be honored if you would join us in discovering the give of our Savior.



2021

**2021 CALENDARS:**

Calendars for the year 2021 are available for your taking. Besides having space for you to write your family appointments, the calendar also contains information about Mass and Reconciliation times here at Our Lady Chapel. We wish to thank the Schulte-Mahon-Murphy Funeral Homes for their generous donation of these 2021 Calendars to us. Please feel free to take as many calendars as you would like. Thank you.

**THANK YOU:**

A special note of “thanks” goes out to all of you who participated in our **Giving Tree** and our **Adopt a Family** programs. Many families, in addition to literally hundreds of gifts for children from the giving tree were gathered again this year. Thank you and God bless each of you for sharing your life with someone else. A special thank you to **Patty Szaniszlo, Tina Newton** for all their hard work in coordinating these projects. Again, thanks to all who participated. As usual, your generosity in reaching out to others has been marvelous. Thank you. You are special.

**CHRISTMAS FLOWERS AND DECORATIONS:**

Again this year we will accept memorial donations to help defray the cost of flowers and decorations which we use in our chapel for the Christmas season. If you are interested in making a donation **in memory of loved ones**, please put the names of the loved ones along with your donation in an envelope, mark it “Christmas Flowers,” and either give it to Father John or drop it in the offering basket. We will publish the names of the loved ones in the Bulletin as a memorial.

**TWO WOMEN BLESSED BY GOD:**

Today we find ourselves in the company of two women who heard God’s voice through their own unique experiences. Both said “yes” to that voice. Elizabeth — elder cousin of Mary — is pregnant with a son. We come to know him as John the Baptist.

Mary and Elizabeth come together with this sign of affirmation of God’s active presence of fidelity to a covenant desiring an intimate relationship and love. Elizabeth exalts embracing Mary — “Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled” [Luke 1:39-45].

There is a painting of the Visitation by Albertinelli [1503], which describes the profound intimacy of Mary and Elizabeth — these two, faith-filled women, pregnant by the Word of God. St. Augustine described this moment: “O Beauty ever Ancient! O Beauty ever new! Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you. You were within me, but I was not with you. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You shone and dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew a breath and I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace.”

For Mary and Elizabeth, the breath of God’s fragrance was upon them. With that breath they were pregnant with the will of God to be carried and birthed.

—Sister Candice Tucci, O.S.F.

**PRAYER REQUESTS:**

Jesus calls us to pray for one another. Please keep all these people in your prayers.

**PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:**

- For John Visconsi, brother of Tom [\*61] and Tony Visconsi [\*75] and Paulette Poklar, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Brother Joseph Annan, C.S.C., who is undergoing treatment for a stroke.
- For Father Joseph O’Donnell, C.S.C., who is under the care of hospice
- For Sheila Coyne, aunt of Katie Coyne [\*24], who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Frank Nannicola, grandfather of Cassie [\*17], Frank [\*18], and Mia [\*19] Nannicola, who is recovering from cancer surgery.
- For Joseph Boehm who is critically ill with COVID
- For Marie Forsythe, who is seriously ill with COVID
- For Clare Simonetta, infant daughter of Gilmour Science instructor, Jessica Simonetta, who is recovering from open heart surgery.
- For Cassandra Williams [\*15], sister of Sebastian Williams [\*18] who is undergoing treatment for a soft tissue cancerous tumor which is inoperable.
- For Erin Crow, aunt of Logan Cleary [\*20] who is in critical condition following an accident.
- For Brother Paul Kelly, C.S.C., who is hospitalized with a blood clot on his lung.

**FOR THE DECEASED:**

- For Ellen Smith, mother of Tina Newton, grandmother of Justin Newton [\*17].
- For Brother James Blaszak, C.S.C.
- For Robert Figurella, grandfather of Alex [\*22] and Natalie [\*23] Figurella
- For Jeanne Crow, grandmother of Logan Cleary [\*20]
- For Tony Waldron, grandfather of Dominic Schimizzi [\*20]
- For Father Don Cozzens, uncle of Brian Dombek [\*96]
- For Lou Cangelosi, grandfather of Lou [\*09] and Marissa [\*12] Cangelosi.
- For Deacon Thomas Long [St. Christopher’s Parish]
- For Joanne DeMarco, aunt of Johanna Parker, great-aunt of Gia Parker [\*23]
- For Dorothy Slaght, mother of Whitney Slaught, past Men’s Club President, grandmother of Brandon [\*13] and Spencer [\*17] Slaght.
- For Deacon Thomas Grasson [St. Colette]

**PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:**

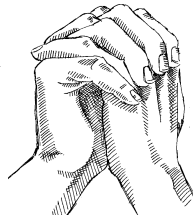
- For the victims of the Tornados in Kentucky and the Midwest
- For a family going through a difficult time.
- For an end to violence and racial injustice in our society.
- For a growth in awareness of the blessing of family life.
- For all those struggling with various addictions.
- For an end to sexual abuse and lack of respect for human persons.
- For a greater respect for human life, from the moment of conception until natural death.
- For all caregivers.
- For all service men and women serving our country, and for their families.
- For a greater awareness of our call to create a more humane and just society.

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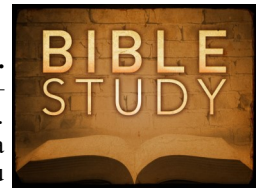
**PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:**

- For Cassandra Williams [\*15], sister of Sebastian Williams [\*18] who is undergoing treatment for a soft tissue cancerous tumor which is inoperable.
- For Erin Crow, aunt of Logan Cleary [\*20] who is in critical condition following an accident.
- For Tammi Ramsey, who is critically ill with COVID
- For Catherine Ivory, aunt of Kitchen associate director, Bobbie Bonner, who is serious ill with COVID
- For Liam Kirchner, a child, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Andrea Polomsky, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Vicki Giancola, mother of Vince Giancola [\*23], who continues treatment for cancer.
- For Joseph Borkey [\*82], brother of Jeff [\*80] and Jerrod [\*87] Borkey, father of Christian Borkey [\*16], and uncle of Jerrod [\*12] and former Gilmour student, Ian Borkey, who is undergoing treatment for cancer
- For Katie Poelking [\*01], sister of TJ Poelking [\*98], who is undergoing treatment for breast cancer.
- For Mary Goers who is undergoing treatment for pancreatic cancer.
- For Serena DiCillo, daughter of David DiCillo [\*84] and Polly Duval DiCillo [\*84], and granddaughter of long-time Gilmour teacher, Bonnie DiCillo, and niece of John [\*83], Dawn [\*86], and Dan [\*88] DiCillo and Laurie Duval Muller-Girard [\*81], who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Ray Gruss who is battling cancer.
- For John Weathers, who is undergoing treatment for liver cancer.
- For Bruce Schwartz, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Bill Barrett, who is undergoing treatment for pancreatic cancer.
- For David Patterson [\*83], brother of Charles [\*79] and Neil [\*81] Patterson, who is undergoing medical treatment.
- For Mary Curran, mother of Megan [\*10], Carolyn [\*12], and Catherine [\*17] Curran, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Addison McKito, sister of Aidan McKito [\*24], who is undergoing treatment for Hodgkin’s Lymphoma.
- For Darlene Lonardo, mother of Joseph Lonardo [\*00], and grandmother of Angelina [\*22] and Giana [\*22] Lonardo, who is undergoing treatment for leukemia.
- For Christine Maharg, mother of Lily Maharg [\*21], who is seriously ill with cancer.
- For Margaret Malarney [\*24] who continues rehab and medical care.
- For Bernice Girgash, aunt of Basketball Coach and Counselor, Dan DeCrane, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Krishna Gupta, Sister of Science teacher, Neena Goel, aunt of Nikhil [\*13] and Nupur [\*17] Goel, who is undergoing treatment for a brain bleed
- For Karuna Singla, Sister-in-law of Science teacher, Neena Goel, aunt of Nikhil [\*13] and Nupur [\*17] Goel, who is undergoing treatment for bone cancer.
- For Melita Chiacchiarri, mother of Mark [\*94], mother-in-law of Michelle DeBacco [\*96] who is undergoing further treatment for cancer.
- For Mike Heryak, husband of Janet, father of Lillian [\*09], Rosa [\*12] and Edwin [\*17] Heryak, who is seriously ill
- For Tom Podnar, father of Lower School art teacher, Eileen Sheehan, who is awaiting a heart transplant.
- For Father James Caddy, former pastor of St. Francis, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.



**NEXT BIBLE STUDY — WEDNESDAY, JAN. 5<sup>th</sup>:**

**Our next Virtual Bible Study will be on Wednesday, January 5<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 PM.** Bible Study continues to meet bi-weekly. The Bible Study is open to everyone — all middle and high school students, college students, young adults, and all adults. We will all come together to be enriched by God’s word. It’s a great time, and a good witness of our faith to others. If you can’t come at 6:30, come when you can. Gather your favorite snack and/or drink, but be prepared to be nourished on God’s word. **Our topic for this Bible Study will be: The Christmas Feasts**



**If you text or email Father John [blazekj@gilmour.org] he will send you the zoom link and password. This is an important step to prevent negative intruders.**

We also need your help — we need future topics. **So, if you have a topic that you would like us to discuss, please let Father John know.** Mark your calendars and be part of this wonderful activity that will deepen your spiritual journey. **We will meet every other week — topic to be decided at the end of the previous meeting.** Join us. You’ll have a blast, and celebrate your faith along the way..

**SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:**

Sunday, December 19: 4 <sup>th</sup> Week in Advent	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream
Monday, December 20:	NO MASS
Tuesday, December 21:	NO MASS
Wednesday, December 22:	NO MASS
Thursday, December 23:	NO MASS
Friday, December 24: Christmas Eve	4:00 PM In Person & Live Stream 6:00 PM In Person & Live Stream
Saturday, December 25: Christmas	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream
Sunday, December 26: Holy Family	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream

**R.C.I.A [Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults]:**

Our RCIA program will begin shortly. If you have been thinking about investigating the Catholic faith, or if you know someone who has been thinking about it; if you have been away from the Catholic Church for a while, or are interested in learning more about the Catholic faith; if you know someone who is not fully initiated [Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation] in their Catholic faith — then consider joining or having them join our RCIA program.



**ADVENT:**

Advent’s intention is to awaken the most profound and basic emotional memory within us, namely — the memory of the God who became a child. This is a healing memory; it brings hope.

—Pope Benedict XVI



**REFLECTION ON THE THEME FOR THE WEEK:**

Our days throughout this time are filled with many “Christmasing events”. We do tend to cram into the emptiness and longing of Advent, Christmas secret Santa gift exchanges, shopping and other preparatory activities which can make the celebration of His birth clouded and distracted.

The prophet Micah speaks about Bethlehem as being “too small to be among the clans of Judah” [Micah 5:2-5]. This is not an unusual pattern in God’s relations with us. Small nations such as Israel, small men such as Abraham, Moses, Hosea, and Joseph, small women such as Sarah, Ruth, and Mary — all seem to form a constellation of heavenly stars. Always from and through the unimportant come the significant, the carriers, those who treasure the sacred. From and through these small come the great works — the wondrous and salvific.

And so the Prophet Micah sings of little Bethlehem: “from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel.” The greatness of this “one Who is to come” is both His lineage and His labors. God seems to take the lowly, little, and least to do the great works of salvation; and it always results from their trusting the One Who calls — and not their own importance.

The prophet Micah has been encouraging the people of Israel about their future — the temple will be raised high on a mountain, and all nations will see her as a holy nation. From the little town of Bethlehem — the place of David, the great king of Israel — will come a special person to be the awaited-for great leader. This person will be of the line of David — and as with David, this “one” will bring back all of Israel into the kingdom that God had established them to be. From the smallest shall come forth the revelation of God’s greatness.

Luke’s Gospel is an intimate encounter between two women of faith. Both have trusted in the secrecy of pregnancy; both are moved to share their secret [Luke 1:39-45]. It is said that a person is as sick as their secrets. It seems that healthy secrets are those which will result in life, growth, and joyfulness.

Mary has been greeted by an angel and trusts what she hears in her soul. Elizabeth hears Mary’s greeting and trusts what she hears and feels within her body. Elizabeth greets Mary with a tender benediction: “Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”

Mary is pictured as having received a tremendous gift and promise. The first thing she is moved to do is to take care of her cousin whom she has heard is pregnant too. Reception implies grateful distribution. So much preparation for the great Gift of God’s impregnating the womb of this world.

People marvel at the process of birth. It is just too much of a kind of miracle — even in the midst of pain that leads to it. Christmas is like that — it too can be too much for us to handle and take in. Bethlehem, Israel, Mary, stable, manger, shepherds, you, me, us — all too small and yet all hold and behold the secret’s now being announced.

God has come to us according to what makes sense to our minds. Through our senses God has come to visit and stay. It does remain more than we can handle and yet God continues to give the Gift into our little hands — our little stables, our little mangers to hold and begin distributing. He came that we might have life and be freed to give it, and Him away in the life-long, life-giving visits we make in the lives of others. Christmas is for those of us who seek intimacy in life. Christmas grows us up.

—taken from the writings of Father Larry Gillick, S.J., which appear on the internet

**WHAT A BLESSING:**

To fall in love with God is the greatest romance; to seek Him the greatest adventure; to find Him, the greatest human achievement.

—St. Augustine

**THE VISITATION:**

As our world is bursting with excitement these last days before Christmas, the Church presents us with two expectant mothers, bursting with the excitement of their pregnancies. We refer to the scene as the “Visitation” [Luke 1:39-45]. Spiritual writers have often said that Mary’s first act as the mother of the Savior is to bring his love and kindness to her kinswoman, Elizabeth — the Visitation being an act of charity. There is far more to this meeting than that. After all, Elizabeth was the wife of Zechariah, a Temple priest whose rank was so high that he was chosen that year to be the priest to enter the innermost chamber of the Temple — the Holy of Holies. Certainly there were plenty of women around Elizabeth to help her through her pregnancy and childbirth.

This meeting of the two expectant mothers has a deeper significance than just being an example of charity. It is the Old Testament pointing to the New Testament — it is John within Elizabeth, leaping for joy, pointing to Jesus within Mary.

Let’s focus on each of these mothers.

First, consider Elizabeth. She was married into the heart of the Temple tradition. She, in her pregnancy, represents the best of the ancient chosen people of God. The Temple was a sign pointing to God. The ancient Hebrews struggled with the concept of constructing a Temple. Pagans constructed temples and limited their gods to their buildings. The Hebrews knew that God could not be limited to one place. But they wanted a place to honor God. They wanted a place that would hold a special presence of the One whom the universe could not contain.

Elizabeth’s body was like that ancient Temple. Her body contained the one who would point out the Lord to the world. John the Baptist, within Elizabeth, leapt for joy in the presence of Jesus within Mary. John, the last of the ancient Israelite prophets became the first of the Christian prophets pointing to the one he would later call the Lamb of God. John embodied and brought to a conclusion the Temple Tradition of Israel, the tradition of reminding the people that God is among them.

When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain in the Temple that separated the Holy of Holies was torn in two. Now everyone — not just the high priests like Zechariah — could experience the deepest presence of God. The Temple is no longer needed to point to the Lord. The Lord is among us. Our homes, our families, our parishes, our lives have been transformed into the new Temples of the Lord. We must keep our homes sacred and holy, for they are the dwelling places of the Lord. We must keep our bodies and our lives sacred and holy, for they also are dwelling places of the Lord. The Lord is not just among us — he is within us as he was within Mary that beautiful day when Elizabeth met her cousin.

Mary, the expectant young girl, was bursting with joy — not just for Elizabeth, but for the life within her. Mary did not just put up with the pregnancy. It wasn’t as though she had no choice but to deal with being pregnant. Like all good mothers she loved being pregnant. But more than any other mother, she enjoyed a unique possession of the Word of God within her. Mary proclaimed the *Magnificat* to Elizabeth — “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.” Mary knew what the Lord was doing within her and for her. He was raising her up from being one of many young women to the one whom all ages would call blessed — “The Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.” She is the Blessed Virgin; the Mother of the Lord — “Who am I, that the Mother of our Lord should come to me?” asks Elizabeth.

God’s plan for the redemption of the world began with Mary. She was the woman of faith and the woman of courage who said “yes” to the Lord. Let’s go back to that moment when Mary agreed to become the mother of the Lord. It is the moment when the annunciation — the angel Gabriel’s message — was transformed into the incarnation — God took on flesh within Mary. Mary could have said “No.” She could have given a million reasons why she could not make this sacrifice, just as we give a million reasons why this or that sacrifice is too much for us. But Mary said, “Yes”.

I love Denise Levertov’s poem *Annunciation*. It embodies the hope of the world waiting for an

**THE LIE OF SELF-RELIANCE:**

I can do it on my own; I don't need anyone; I can't trust anyone; I can only trust myself. Have you ever said anything like this? Or, have you ever believed that you could make it through this life on your own? We live in a time where being independent — totally independent — is a sought-after quality. Don't get me wrong; independence is not a bad thing. It becomes a problem when we believe we can do everything ourselves. The problem? It can shove others out — most notably Jesus.

Jesus reminds us: "Without me, you can do nothing" [John 15:5]. The truth is we cannot do everything ourselves and we were not made to do everything ourselves. Sometimes we need to go back to the basics. We already have a Savior — and His name is Jesus, not me! — and not you. We have a God who chooses us, desires us, loves us, and wants to be in a relationship with us. Countless stories in Scripture illustrate people who needed a Savior. We are all in need of a Savior. Identifying the trap of "I can do everything on my own" or "I don't need anybody" is crucial to a life of freedom. Here are some important reminders for us to better recognize our self-reliance.

You and I are hardwired for relationships. One of the downsides of self-reliance is that you don't let other people help you. This can lead to you being overwhelmed or making others feel bad because they feel like you are not open to inviting them into your life. It is not bad if we can complete a task independently; the bad thing is when we refuse to let others help — especially when you can really use the help. The importance of embracing vulnerability is crucial to connecting in community. Sometimes, self-reliance can rob us of authentic and true friendship that we desire and need. Without vulnerability, relationships struggle. It is ok not to have it together and share our struggles with trusted peers. Vulnerability is a key to connection because it is the courage to be open to others. When we are brave enough to be ourselves, we permit others to do the same. Has a past relationship closed you off to others and made you self-reliant? Do you fear rejection if people see your brokenness?

St. Faustina says: "Oh, how good it is to abandon oneself totally to God and to give Him full freedom to act in one's soul!" Easier said than done, right? A common tendency amongst individuals is to rely on themselves when the current of life is smooth, and we do not seem to need anybody. Then, when something arises in life that we cannot control, such as trying out for a sports team, awaiting acceptance into college, or something life-threatening like a friend or family member getting cancer, we beg of Jesus to hear our wants and desires. Recognizing when we are falling into the "I can do everything myself mode" will help us lean into and build a trusting relationship with God. Even when the current of life is uninterrupted, we always need total surrender and reliance on Jesus. Do you pray for an increase in trust with God?

We can't do everything is a true statement. And how relieving and freeing it is knowing we are not made to do everything on our own. We have a Father in Heaven who rejoices over being with us on our journey. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him" [see Ephesians 1].

—taken from the writings of Kelly Colangelo, which appear on the internet

**CELEBRATE THE NEW YEAR — BEGIN WITH MASS:**

It has been a long-standing tradition here at Our Lady Chapel that we begin our New Year's Eve celebration by first coming to Mass before going out for the evening. This affords us a great opportunity to begin the New Year with a time of prayer and worship of God. **January 1<sup>st</sup>** is not a **Holy Day of obligation** this year. But the **Feast of the Motherhood of God** and **New Year's Day** still remain important in our lives. In addition, our Holy Father, Pope Francis has asked all of us to pray intensely on January 1<sup>st</sup> for world peace. **We will have a Mass on Friday, December 31<sup>st</sup> at 5:30 PM.** Please plan on joining us.

**MARY, JESUS EXPERT:**

In the 1970's, if someone wanted to increase their tennis prowess, they would watch Chris Evert Lloyd's moves on the court. For the millions of little girls with the iconic "Dorothy Hamill" pixie and dreams of being an Olympic skater, it was all about finding every opportunity to see Dorothy Hamill perform the Hamill Camel. If you were looking to improve your pitching, you'd study Tom Seaver, Steve Carlton, or Jim Palmer. What drew people to them? They were experts. They had reached a goal most could only dream of achieving. If you wanted to get there as well, it made only sense to turn to role models of success.

So, it stands to reason if we long to uncover the path, learn the wisdom, and acquire the disposition of heart required to follow Jesus, we have but to look to one expert — Mary, his mother. By contemplating her principle virtues, actions, and devotion, we can reach unparalleled heights of faith.

There is no courage without fear. True courage is persevering with the task before you in the face of your trepidation. Mary, filled with grace, faced with many circumstances we may consider fearful — having to tell your betrothed about your pregnancy, escaping from a King determined to slay your newborn son, and being present at the foot of the Cross. Yet, her faith was unwavering. Mary teaches us courage in the trials of life. Where do you need Mary to guide you to be heroic?

Mary had just received the most incredible news of her life — really in the history of the world. Yet she didn't sit around in shock or contemplating the privilege of being chosen the Mother of God, nor did she head to the town well to spread her good news. Upon hearing her kinswoman Elizabeth is with child, goes in haste to assist her.

Compassion — the care and concern for another. The ability to recognize a need and respond without hesitation brings forth grace upon grace, as witnessed with Elizabeth's greeting when Mary entered the house — "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" [Luke 1:39-45]. Humble and pure of heart, Mary's love for others is present throughout scripture.

We'll see Mary's compassion exhibited again at Cana [see John 2] when Mary comes to the aid of the bride and groom and unselfishly relinquishes her private life with Jesus, while imparting one of her greatest lessons — "Do whatever He tells you." Will you allow Mary to reveal where your assistance is needed and, more importantly, how to respond with haste?

One minute you are looking at cute dresses for Easter; the next, your daughter is nowhere to be seen. Luckily, this feeling of panic lasts only a few seconds for most of us, when the child emerges from the clothing rack right next to us. But for Mary the horror of searching for her missing son lasted three days [see Luke 2]. Throughout those hours of travel and seeking for the child, Jesus, she put her hope in God. Although anxious, knowing with her whole heart that God is always in control and works all things for good, Mary surely experienced the peace that comes from trusting God.

Perhaps, in her many prayers those three days, Mary called upon the words of Psalm 80 as a prayer — "Once again, O Lord of hosts, look down from heaven, and see; take care of this vine, and protect what your right hand has planted the son of man whom you yourself made strong."

Jesus is always found when we seek him — especially in our prayers. In what current situations can you put your hope in God and trust like Mary? Mary's expertise showed in how she lived out better than anyone the words spoken in Luke's Gospel: "Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

—taken from the writings of Allison Gingras, which appear on the internet

**POWERFUL WORDS:**

You must be the change you want to see in the world.

—Mahatma Gandhi



**PREGNANCY AND PERSONHOOD:**

The story is told of an unbeliever accosting a Christian: “If I told you that an infant was born of a virgin in this city, would you believe me?” “Yes,” replied the Christian, “if he lived as Jesus did.” Have you ever wondered how a physician might handle Luke’s Gospel of the Visitation? [Luke 1:39-45]. If affirmative, you are in luck. I found an article by John Willke, MD. I found his thoughts in a paper titled *Mary’s Pregnancy*. The Church speaks thousands of words each week on abortion. “But how come,” you ask shrewdly. “The Gospel is silent on the question as to when human life actually begins.” But the fact is that it is not. We know that Mary conceived of the Holy Spirit. But what did she conceive? Was it but a fertilized ovum which in turn became an embryo?

When did the embryo become a fetus which only weeks or even months later developed into a person? Doctor Willke asserts that Luke’s Gospel answers those questions. He posits that Luke — a fellow physician — is telling us that Mary conceived the person of the God-Man Jesus from day one of her pregnancy. Luke tells us that right after the angel’s visit Mary made an impromptu trip to her cousin Elizabeth out in the back country. The trip took almost a week. The young woman was pregnant about ten days. Did Mary believe she was pregnant? By faith, yes. She had said to the angel: “May it be done to me according to your word.” But she had no physical proof of her pregnancy. Humanly speaking, she had to wonder whether as a virgin she had truly conceived.



Traditionally we say Mary went out to help her older cousin during her pregnancy. But that is only half the tale. Some of her reasons for going out there were not quite that altruistic. Was her cousin pregnant she wondered as the angel had said? If affirmative, then the angel could be trusted as an authentic messenger from God. And so she herself would indeed be expecting a child. Breathlessly she reaches her cousin’s door. At six months, Elizabeth is obviously pregnant. The excited Mary concludes then she herself is pregnant. But Elizabeth had not been told of her cousin’s pregnancy. And after ten days Mary was hardly “showing.” Yet, Elizabeth impulsively shouts: “Blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honored with a visit from the mother of my Lord?”

At the time, Jesus was hardly the size of a pinhead and had only been just implanted into the lining of Mary’s womb. Yet His mother’s cousin was moved to call Him “my Lord.” So, Mary was hardly carrying a personless embryo that would become a fetus and then a person. Rather, Elizabeth was inspired to realize that in the early days of her pregnancy her cousin, says Dr Willke, “was already carrying the person of the God-Man Jesus.”

But the story is not done. In response to her cousin’s salutation, Elizabeth said: “For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy.” Her babe was, of course, John. He would be known to history as John the Baptizer.

Thus, John, himself already a person, salutes not merely a ten day old personless embryo, but another genuine person. What is Luke’s Gospel telling us through Elizabeth and her unborn son John? Human life, “alive, sexed, and complete,” is present in every mother’s womb from the beginning of her pregnancy. The visit of the Christ to Elizabeth in the early days of His development is a far greater witness to the sanctity of human life, says Dr Willke, than all of the scientific facts and pictures that one can conjure up. Dr Willke concludes that every abortion then is the killing of a living, fully human being. Jesus has clearly taught us that abortion is wrong, he declares, by the decisive facts of His early days in Mary’s womb. We are in debt to Luke and John Willke — physicians both. Both doctors would remind us that though infants die by chance, they should never die by choice.

—taken from the writings of Father James Gilhooly, which appear on the internet

Mary — Jesus’ Mother — is the pre-eminent figure of this. She shows us hope: Not only did she believe the promise, she became pregnant with it, gestated it, gave it her own flesh, went through the pains of childbirth to give it reality, and then nursed a fragile new life into a powerful adulthood that saved the world. In that, she needs imitation, not admiration.

Advent is the season for us to imitate Mary’s hope by, like her, gestating faith, God’s promise, into real flesh.

—taken from the writings of Father Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I., which appear on the internet

**MARY’S ROLE IN THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY:**

Opening our hearts to mercy and justice brings joy. It only makes sense. Those who live grateful lives are happy people. Gratitude for God’s multi-faceted mercy brings happiness and joy. Luke’s Gospel for this 4<sup>th</sup> Week in Advent presents us with two of the most grateful women in human history. Mary says: “My soul magnifies the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior” [Luke 1:38-45].

Mary is the New Eve. Paul’s letter to the Church at Corinth tells us that Jesus — the New Adam — came to do God’s will [see 1 Corinthians 15]. Mary — the New Eve — says: “Let it be done to me according to your will” [Luke 1:38]. Mary embraced God’s will — she was full of joy. It’s interesting that Moslems also recognize this. The Quran presents Mary as pure and sinless — that is, someone always obeyed God’s will. Mary can help us find peace in our world today. Every January 1<sup>st</sup>, the Church observes World Day of Peace; it is also the Feast of Mary, the Mother of God. So we ask a woman important to both Moslems and Christian to pray for us — to find a path to peace.

Do not miss out on Mary. It is true that Jesus is the most important to us — He is everything. Perhaps we can express it this way: Jesus is like the sun and Mary is like the moon. Her glory is to reflect the light of Jesus. Without the sun we would soon die. But the moon also plays an important role. And how much great poetry and great beauty we would miss without the moon?

Luke’s Gospel gives us a powerful reason not to miss out on Mary. Elizabeth exclaims: “Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” This was the reaction of St. Juan Diego when Mary appeared to him. He protested that he was so insignificant. Using his own idiom he addressed her as “My young lady, my daughter, the littlest of my daughters.” These words signify both respect and affection. And she said to him: “My son, the smallest, do not fear.”

You and I are little people. If we remembered that, how much useless anguish would we avoid? Recently a guy came to me all upset because of something President Obama said. I told him: “We are little people. Our job is to pray for the president.” Sure, we can vote, send a letter, even join a political party. But overall we will still be little people. I don’t know about you, but I would feel great to hear Mary call me her littlest son. Our Lady of Guadalupe shows that Mary gives preference to the child neglected, hurting, and humbled. If you are feeling downcast, discouraged — come to Mary. This Christmas, come to Jesus. Bring your family members. And ask Mary to help you. Remember what Pope Francis said: “The Virgin Mary, cause of our joy, always brings us back to joy in the Lord, who comes to free us from so many interior and exterior slaveries.”

—taken from the writings of Father Phil Bloom which appear on the internet.

**SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION:**

Father John is available to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with you. Please call him [440-473-3560] to arrange for this experience. All social distancing will remain in place. Always remember the Lord’s invitation: “I will give them a heart with which to understand that I am the Lord. They shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart”. [Jeremiah 24:7].



**ADVENT — GESTATING HOPE INTO REALITY:**

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, as even his critics admit, was a man of hope. Indeed his whole vision of things is generally criticized for being too hopeful. So, in trying to explain hope and advent, allow me a Teilhard story. Teilhard was a scientist, and a good one, but he was also a Christian, a priest, and a man whose ultimate vision of things was formed by the gospels. Central to his whole system of thought was his rock-bottom belief that ultimately all of history — cosmic and human — would come together in Christ into one community of life and love — as promised by Jesus and as summarized in Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus [1:3-10]. This vision was the wide framework within which he ultimately set his scientific theories. But he was surrounded by colleagues — both Christian and secular — who had a far-less hopeful view of things. One day he was challenged this way: “You have an enchanted view of history, believing that everything will one day culminate in a wonderful ‘kingdom’ of peace and love, but suppose we blow up the world in a nuclear war, what happens to your schema of things then?”

His response to that question is a textbook definition of hope: “If we blow up the world it would be a great tragedy because it would set things back millions of years. But history will still one day culminate in a kingdom of peace and love — not because my theory says so, but because God promised it, and in the resurrection has shown the power to bring this about, despite the things we do.”

That's hope, to be able to say: “It might take a million years or so longer, but it will happen because God promised it.”

By what is this characterized? Let's begin with a certain “via negative”. Hope is not wishful thinking, natural optimism, or an educated theory based upon CNN. Hope is not the simple longing for something wonderful to happen to us — I can wish to win a lottery, marry the most beautiful person in the world, or score the winning goal in the world cup, but that isn't hope; it's pure wish. Similarly, hope is not optimism — a natural temperament, however pleasant, which is perennially upbeat and always sees the positive side of things. Finally, hope is also not a positive diagnosis based upon a shrewd assessment of the facts. Jim Wallis once quipped: “Put not your faith in CNN!” The same holds true for FOX News, MSNBC, BBC, CBC, NBC, ABC, ITV, SKY NEWS, and WORLD NEWS. One does not ultimately ground hope on whether the world situation seems to be improving or worsening. Hope does not go up and down like the stock market because, in the end, it is not based upon the empirical facts as these are reported on the news.

Hope is believing in the promise of God and believing that God has the power to fulfill that promise.

What is that promise? God has promised that history — our private histories, our communal history, and cosmic history — will one day come together in an ecstatic oneness — a heaven, a paradise, a community of life around Christ and in God within which there will be no tears and no death. This will not be a community of life focused on “food and drink”, but one that takes it very breath from love, justice, peace, friendship, affection, and shared delight in a common spirit, the Holy Spirit.

And what power will bring this about? The power that God showed in the resurrection of Jesus — the power to bring a dead body back to life, to redeem what's been lost, to write straight with crooked lines, and to bring people together, despite and beyond hatred, sin, selfishness, mistakes, tragedy, resistance, death, and all that will ever be seen on CNN.

To live in hope is to live in the face of that promise and that power, and, in that light, to fundamentally shape both our memories and our future. As regards memory, to hope is to look back on our lives and see no need to count the losses, underline the hurts, play the victim, or stew in bitterness because all our wounds and losses can be redeemed as part of a greater promise. The same holds true for our future. All our plans and schemes must reflect the wider plan of God and we, like Teilhard, should be prepared to live in great patience as we wait for the finished symphony.

**MARY — MODEL OF CHRISTMAS:**

Luke's Gospel [1:26-45] introduces us to a teenage girl from Nazareth in Galilee by the name of Mary. Committed to doing the will of God, she consented to being the mother of the Messiah and is now making a hasty trip of some 60 miles to visit her relative Elizabeth, who in old age is six months pregnant. When she arrives, Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, blesses Mary, extolling her for her faith that God's word would be fulfilled.

Mary of Nazareth has been an important figure in Catholic spirituality throughout the whole history of Christianity. She has been a model and inspiration for various groups — vowed religious who dedicate their lives to prayer and service; mothers committed to raising their children; wives determined to hold their families together; and contemporary women interested in overcoming the injustices of patriarchy and sexism. Vatican II introduced a broader understanding of Mary as the model for the whole Church, and a guide for all men and women striving to be faithful disciples of Christ.

We can envision a Marian influence on Christians serious about following Christ. A man making a career change spent time in prayerful discernment, as did Mary, asking himself relevant questions about potential employers — including their ethical standards and social commitments. A single woman in her late twenties, who was feeling lonely and depressed without a husband, looked to Mary for guidance and decided to make the most of her life — enjoying her friends, advancing her career, participating in her parish, and serving her community. All this activity filled up some empty space, lifted her spirits, and provided her with a sense of meaning and purpose, which left her better prepared for a future relationship. Reflecting on the haste with which Mary went to visit Elizabeth, a young man who had completely ignored the Advent season, vowed to make the most of the few days before Christmas by setting aside time each day for spiritual reading and acts of charity.

What can you learn from the example of Mary of Nazareth, and how could you incorporate these lessons into your daily life?

—taken from the writings of Father Jim Bacik which appear on the inter-

**SERVING THE LORD IN THE POOR — JANUARY 15<sup>th</sup>:**

Our Savior Lutheran Church, across the street from Gilmour, has a Food Pantry which distributes food to the community on **the third Saturday of each month**. They welcome volunteers. If you want to volunteer, they have instituted some **new procedures** because of the Coronavirus. **Thus they help pre-pack nonperishables in bags on Thursday evening beginning at 5 PM.** They continue this prepacking on Friday if needed. Check with Elina Gurney on this. **On Saturday morning at 9 AM, they need help putting items from the foodbank into the prepacked bags.** Only volunteers will be allowed in the Church building, so you will be protected against the virus. Clients will remain outside in their cars. **The food pantry is then open from 9:30 AM—1:30 PM on Saturday.**

Our Savior Lutheran's Food Pantry was formed to serve those in emergency situations and/or with on-going need in the cities of Mayfield Heights, Mayfield Village, Highland Heights and Gates Mills. The Food Pantry respects social and cultural diversity and upholds the worth and dignity of those it serves. All those in the area with need will be served equally, as supplies allow. The food pantry is a member of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank.

**Please let Elina Gurney know if you would like to help. You can do this through the chapel office [440-473-3560] or by emailing Elina Gurney at [gurney.oh@gmail.com](mailto:gurney.oh@gmail.com).** In this critical time, this is a wonderful way to serve others. Please consider this opportunity.

**YOU HAVE A PURPOSE:**

You were put on this earth to shine your light so brightly that it illuminates the next person's darkness.



**ARE YOU LOOKING FOR CHRISTMAS?**

I called a friend this week on his cell phone and when he answered, I could tell by the background noise that he was not at home. “Where are you?” “At the mall,” he said. “Oh, you’re probably doing your Christmas shopping.” “No,” he said, “I’m here looking — looking for Christmas.”

This threw me and so I asked him: “What do you mean, you’re looking for Christmas?” My friend explained: “You see when I was a child, Christmas just happened. The anticipation, the excitement, the mystery were all immediate. All through December, the feelings, the rush, the thrill kept building until Christmas morning. It was magic. But now that I am an adult and my own children are grown, it’s different. Today I realized that it’s only a few days from Christmas, and as yet I have felt nothing — no anticipating, no excitement, no wonder. So, I took off a few hours and I came here to the mall just to look and to try to see if I could find something to ignite that excitement. I hate to admit it, but this Christmas I’m out looking for Christmas.”

It is a little less than a week until Christmas. How is it for you? Are you finding yourself excited, involved, engaged in the wonder of these upcoming days? Or are you going through the routine? If you find that you lack magic of the season, do you think it makes sense to go out and look for Christmas? That is an important question, and the answer to it depends on what you think you are looking for. Because in one sense looking for Christmas is foolish, but in another it is not only wise, but necessary.

If what you are looking for is your childhood, those simple days when Christmas happened like a force of nature, then looking is a waste of time. We cannot live our lives backwards. We cannot become children again. We are adults, with adult responsibility and experiences. Our lives are complex and busy. We cannot experience Christmas with the simplicity of a child in which the thrill of the holiday overrides everything else.

Yet—even though it is useless to go out looking for our childhood, the child within us can still help us look for Christmas. I say this because the one thing that is certain about children at Christmas is that they believe. They believe that the gifts will arrive. They believe that their family will be together. They believe that Christmas morning will be wonderful. It is that childlike faith that we can imitate even as adults.

What then is our faith? What do we as adults believe? Let me remind you. We believe that God has made us and given us the Son as our Savior. We believe that God loves us and is always working to bring life out of death and light out of darkness. We believe that God is a present force in our life and that whatever we have to face, whatever we have to deal with, God is always seeking to bless us and to give us joy. With that faith we can celebrate Christmas even if we are dealing with sickness or grief or problems in our family. Because even in those circumstances we believe that God is still looking for an opportunity to touch us and to give us peace. In faith, even though our lives are complex and busy, we believe that it only takes a moment for God to seize us and give us joy.

That moment might come in a chance conversation with a stranger in the mall. It might happen in a glance of gratitude that someone gives us because of our generosity. It can surprise us in sudden laughter that interrupts a long illness or struggle. It can emerge in an intimate touch from a faithful spouse. Like Mary and Elizabeth in Luke’s Gospel, that moment can be as simple as a meeting of old friends who recount what has happened in their lives and how God has blessed them [Luke 1:39-45].

For children, Christmas is a month-long crescendo building to a dramatic climax on Christmas morning. But, for most of us adults, our lives are too complex to sustain that kind of celebration. Fortunately, all adults need is a moment — a moment in which the truth breaks through, a moment in which we remember again that God is real, that we are loved, that life is good. Such a moment could



“No.” She could have given a million reasons why she could not make this sacrifice, just as we give a million reasons why this or that sacrifice is too much for us. But Mary said, “Yes”.

I love Denise Levertov’s poem *Annunciation*. It embodies the hope of the world waiting for an answer from a young virgin. We all know the scene — the room, variously furnished, almost always a lectern, a book, a tall lily and an angelic ambassador, standing or hovering, whom she acknowledges.

We are told of meek obedience. No one mentions the courage.

The engendering spirit did not enter her without consent. God waited.

She was free to accept or refuse, choice integral to humanness.

Aren’t there annunciations of one sort or another in most lives?

Some unwillingly undertake great destinies, enact them in sullen pride, uncomprehending.

More often these moments, when roads of light and storm open from darkness in a man or woman, these moments are turned away from in dread, in a wave of weakness, in despair and with relief.

Ordinary lives continue. God does not smite them. But the gates close; the pathways vanish.

She did not wail, she only asked: “how can this be?” and gravely, courteously, took to heart the angel’s reply, perceiving instantly the ministry she was offered

To bear in her womb

Infinite weight and lightness; to carry in hidden, finite inwardness nine months of Eternity; to contain in the slender vase of being the sum of power--in narrow flesh, the sum of light.

Then to bring to birth, push out into air, a Man-child needing like any other, milk and love — but who was God.

This was the minute no one speaks of, when she could still refuse.

A breath unbreathed, Spirit suspended, waiting.

She did not cry: “I cannot, I am not worthy.” nor, “I have not the strength.”

She did not submit with gritted teeth, raging, coerced.

Bravest of all humans, consent illumined her.

The room filled with its light, the lily glowed in it, and the wings of the angel became iridescent.

Consent, courage unparalleled, opened her utterly.

And we have been saved because Mary trusted in God. We understand the importance of Elizabeth’s words to Mary — “Blessed is she who trusted that the Lord’s word to her will be fulfilled.”

The meeting of Elizabeth and Mary is the pointing of the Old Testament to the New, the revelation of the Messiah to the people longing for a transformation, the message that we who have been chosen to make the Lord present in the world must, like Mary, say “yes” to God’s plans. For God works his wonders in those who trust in him.

—taken from the writings of Monsignor Joseph Pellegrino which appear on the internet

**NOVENA TO BLESSED BASILE MOREAU:**

Blessed Basile Moreau was the founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, to which Fr. John and the Brothers at Gilmour belong. We have two booklets with Novenas to Blessed Basile Moreau. One is used for a personal intention or healing; the other is used when praying for the intention or healing of someone other than yourself. The Novenas were composed by Father Thomas Looney, C.S.C. Many have received blessings and healings through the intercession of Blessed Basile Moreau, and now we want to extend this invitation to you and your family. Please see Father John and he will be glad to give you the booklets.

**GRATITUDE:**

While expressing gratitude seems innocent enough, it is a revolutionary idea. In a consumer society, contentment is a radical proposition.

—Robin Wall Kimmerer



**THE VISITATION:**

As our world is bursting with excitement these last days before Christmas, the Church presents us with two expectant mothers, bursting with the excitement of their pregnancies. We refer to the scene as the “Visitation” [Luke 1:39-45]. Spiritual writers have often said that Mary’s first act as the mother of the Savior is to bring his love and kindness to her kinswoman, Elizabeth — the Visitation being an act of charity. There is far more to this meeting than that. After all, Elizabeth was the wife of Zechariah, a Temple priest whose rank was so high that he was chosen that year to be the priest to enter the innermost chamber of the Temple — the Holy of Holies. Certainly there were plenty of women around Elizabeth to help her through her pregnancy and childbirth.

This meeting of the two expectant mothers has a deeper significance than just being an example of charity. It is the Old Testament pointing to the New Testament — it is John within Elizabeth, leaping for joy, pointing to Jesus within Mary.

Let’s focus on each of these mothers.

First, consider Elizabeth. She was married into the heart of the Temple tradition. She, in her pregnancy, represents the best of the ancient chosen people of God. The Temple was a sign pointing to God. The ancient Hebrews struggled with the concept of constructing a Temple. Pagans constructed temples and limited their gods to their buildings. The Hebrews knew that God could not be limited to one place. But they wanted a place to honor God. They wanted a place that would hold a special presence of the One whom the universe could not contain.

Elizabeth’s body was like that ancient Temple. Her body contained the one who would point out the Lord to the world. John the Baptist, within Elizabeth, leapt for joy in the presence of Jesus within Mary. John, the last of the ancient Israelite prophets became the first of the Christian prophets pointing to the one he would later call the Lamb of God. John embodied and brought to a conclusion the Temple Tradition of Israel, the tradition of reminding the people that God is among them.

When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain in the Temple that separated the Holy of Holies was torn in two. Now everyone — not just the high priests like Zechariah — could experience the deepest presence of God. The Temple is no longer needed to point to the Lord. The Lord is among us. Our homes, our families, our parishes, our lives have been transformed into the new Temples of the Lord. We must keep our homes sacred and holy, for they are the dwelling places of the Lord. We must keep our bodies and our lives sacred and holy, for they also are dwelling places of the Lord. The Lord is not just among us — he is within us as he was within Mary that beautiful day when Elizabeth met her cousin.

Mary, the expectant young girl, was bursting with joy — not just for Elizabeth, but for the life within her. Mary did not just put up with the pregnancy. It wasn’t as though she had no choice but to deal with being pregnant. Like all good mothers she loved being pregnant. But more than any other mother, she enjoyed a unique possession of the Word of God within her. Mary proclaimed the *Magnificat* to Elizabeth — “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.” Mary knew what the Lord was doing within her and for her. He was raising her up from being one of many young women to the one whom all ages would call blessed — “The Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.” She is the Blessed Virgin; the Mother of the Lord — “Who am I, that the Mother of our Lord should come to me?” asks Elizabeth.

God’s plan for the redemption of the world began with Mary. She was the woman of faith and the woman of courage who said “yes” to the Lord. Let’s go back to that moment when Mary agreed to become the mother of the Lord. It is the moment when the annunciation — the angel Gabriel’s message — was transformed into the incarnation — God took on flesh within Mary. Mary could have said

happen today, or Christmas morning, or two weeks from now. But whenever it happens — whenever God’s love breaks through — it is then that Christmas will arrive.

Now we all enjoy the traditions of the season. It would be beautiful if all the shopping and baking and planning and customs would pull together in a harmonious build up to a dramatic climax this Saturday morning. But adults know that Christmas is deeper than all those things — deeper than Santa, deeper than gifts, deeper than Christmas morning. Christmas is whenever the love of God breaks through and touches our lives.

So, if you have not yet caught the Christmas spirit, if you are not filled with holiday excitement, do not be afraid to go out and look for Christmas. Now you know what you’re looking for.

—taken from the writings of Father George Smiga, which appear on the internet

**IT’S TIME TO LET GO:**

I’m someone who has always loved having a plan — always knowing the next step. I suppose it is not the plan I enjoy so much as the comfort of having control over my situations. Even as a little girl, I worried about the unknown — “But Mommy, what if it goes wrong? Then what?” My mom never wavered in her answer: “Now is not the time to worry” or “We’ll cross that bridge when we get to it.”

And bridges there were. The bridges have been many — and there will continue to be many. Life is filled with events that that require leaps of faith, trusting in the unknown. A long time ago, a young peasant girl, in the town of Nazareth, took a leap of faith. That girl was Mary.

Mary was engaged to Joseph. The Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her she would conceive a child, and that child would be the Son of God [Luke 1:26-38]. We know the story so well that sometimes I think we forget the scandal of it. Though Mary was bearing the Son of God, to outsiders she was merely a pregnant woman out of wedlock. The punishment under Mosaic law for having a child out of wedlock was death.

Mary knew all of this, and yet, she was not worried about what others would think of her, what they would say, or how they would act. She did not ask for a sign or a plan. **She simply surrendered herself to God; she put her whole life into His hands, and trusted in Him.**

Throughout Advent, I often find myself thinking of Mary — of what she might have been thinking and feeling. I wonder how I would have responded if an angel appeared to me — would I be afraid, scared, confused? Would I wonder if God had made a mistake — “Surely, not I, Lord?” Or would I respond with grace and humility, as Mary did — “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”

As the season of Christmas continues to draw near, I can only hope to be more like Mary — more grace filled, more holy, more obedient, more loving, more pure, and more patient. But most importantly, I aspire to trust in God as Mary did. **The power of faith in God is not that you are without questions, but that those questions do not prevent you from surrendering yourself to Him.**

When you do, God allows incredible things to happen. Now that I am older, I often turn to Mary — my heavenly mother — with all my “what ifs.” If I am quiet enough, in my heart I can hear her saying: “**now is not the time to worry, be at peace, trust in God.**” Mary’s “yes” changed the world forever — what will your “yes” do?

—taken from the writings of Caitlin Sica, an associate of the Bible Geek

**SERVING OTHERS FULFILLS THE SOUL:**

“Every pious desire, every good thought, every charitable work inspired by the love of Jesus, contributes to the perfection of the whole body of the faithful. A person who does nothing more than lovingly pray to God for his brothers and sisters, participates in the great work of saving souls.”

—Bl. Anne Catherine Emmerich

**THE LESSONS TO LEARN FROM THE NATIVITY SCENE:**

In 2019, Pope Francis issued an apostolic letter on the meaning and importance of the Christmas nativity scene. He signed the document, *Admirabile Signum* ["Enchanting Image"] on December 1<sup>st</sup> of that year, at the Shrine of the Nativity in Greccio — a hilltown in the Italian region of Lazio, where in 1223 St. Francis of Assisi created history's first nativity scene.

In the apostolic letter — widely regarded as one of the most moving documents of Francis' pontificate — the pope sets out "to encourage the beautiful family tradition of preparing the nativity scene in the days before Christmas." Here are 10 things that Pope Francis wants us to learn from the nativity scene, drawn from *Admirabile Signum*:

**1. The nativity scene is like a living Gospel.** The depiction of Jesus' birth is "a simple and joyful proclamation of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God." The nativity scene invites everyone who contemplates it "on a spiritual journey, drawn by the humility of the God who became man in order to encounter every man and woman."

**2. The custom is rooted in the Bible.** Pope underlines that the nativity scene rises from "the pages of sacred Scripture." St. Luke's Gospel says that Mary "gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn" [see Luke 2:7]. The manger is the focus of nativity scenes. Indeed, the Italian word for nativity scene is "presepe," from the Latin word "praesepe," meaning "manger."

**3. The tradition was born in an unassuming Italian town.** St. Francis of Assisi stopped in Greccio in November 1223 — probably on his way back from Rome after receiving papal approval for the Rule of his religious order. Fifteen days before Christmas, he asked a local man named John to help him "bring to life the memory of that babe born in Bethlehem, to see as much as possible with my own bodily eyes the discomfort of his infant needs, how he lay in a manger, and how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he was laid upon a bed of hay." On Christmas Day, St. Francis was joined by his friars and people from the surrounding area before a manger full of hay, watched over an ox and a donkey.

**4. The first nativity scene was connected to the Eucharist.** Describing the scene in Greccio that day, Pope Francis writes: "All those present experienced a new and indescribable joy in the presence of the Christmas scene. The priest then solemnly celebrated the Eucharist over the manger, showing the bond between the Incarnation of the Son of God and the Eucharist." Unlike in nativity scenes today, the pope says, there were no statues. Instead, "the nativity scene was enacted and experienced by all who were present."

**5. The original nativity scene inspired a vision.** The pope recalls that one of the witnesses to the first nativity scene saw "a marvelous vision." Thomas of Celano, the first biographer of St. Francis, wrote that "one of those present saw the Baby Jesus himself lying in the manger."

**6. The nativity scene is a means of evangelization.** The pope says that by creating the nativity scene, St. Francis "carried out a great work of evangelization" that continues to touch hearts to this day. The saint had discovered "a simple yet authentic means of portraying the beauty of our faith" that was accessible to all.

**7. The manger is a sign of God's love.** Pope Francis writes that nativity scenes resonate so deeply because they show God's tender love. They proclaim that "the Creator of the universe lowered himself to take up our littleness." They engage the senses and imagination, helping people "to 'feel' and 'touch' the poverty that God's Son took upon himself in the Incarnation."

**8. The nativity scene contains a call to service.** The pope says that the Christmas crib contains

an implicit message: "It summons us to follow him along the path of humility, poverty, and self-denial that leads from the manger of Bethlehem to the cross. It asks us to meet him and serve him by showing mercy to those of our brothers and sisters in greatest need."

**9. Even a nativity scene's landscapes are meaningful.** The pope notes that depictions of the Nativity often include "the ruins of ancient houses or buildings. More than anything, the ruins are the visible sign of fallen humanity, of everything that inevitably falls into ruin, decays, and disappoints. This scenic setting tells us that Jesus is newness in the midst of an aging world, that he has come to heal and rebuild, to restore the world and our lives to their original splendor."

**10. Nativity scenes nourish devotion to Mary and Joseph.** The pope observes that the Virgin Mary is shown as "a mother who contemplates her child and shows him to every visitor." In her, "we see the Mother of God who does not keep her Son only to herself, but invites everyone to obey his word and to put it into practice." St. Joseph stands at Mary's side, protecting her and the Christ Child. The nativity scene reminds us that Joseph "entrusted himself always to God's will, and put it into practice," encouraging us to do the same.

—taken from an article published by *Catholic News Agency*

**LIFE TEEN and EDGE:**

**Our Life Teen and EDGE youth group is meeting in-person again.** We will meet for an hour beginning at 11:30 AM following our 10 AM Sunday Mass in the Lennon Board

**Room.** If you are unable to join us, there are many resources available for you on the Life Teen website — [lifeteen.com](http://lifeteen.com). There are numerous blogs and videos for you to connect with. The Life Teen national office continues to release many new programs. **Please contact Father John for more information. And please join us each Sunday for our Mass at 10 AM — in person or live-streamed, and then come to our Life Teen/EDGE gathering after Mass.** And above all, let us continue to join each other in prayer. **Father John is available for you. Please contact him [cell: 216-570-9276].**

**READINGS FOR THE WEEK:**

<b>Monday:</b>	Isaiah 7:10-14, Luke 1:26-38
<b>Tuesday:</b>	Song of Songs 2:8-14, Luke 1:39-45
<b>Wednesday:</b>	1 Samuel 1:24-28, Luke 1:46-56
<b>Thursday:</b>	Malachi 3:1-24, Luke 1:57-66
<b>Friday:</b>	2 Samuel 7:1-16, Luke 1:67-79
<b>Saturday:</b>	Isaiah 9:1-6, Titus 2:11-14, Luke 2:1-14 Isaiah 62:11-12, Titus 3:4-7, Luke 2:15-20 Isaiah 52:7-10, Hebrews 1:1-6, John 1:1-18
<b>Feast of the Holy Family:</b>	Sirach 3:2-14, Colossians 3:12-21, Luke 2:41-52

**THE STAR:**

The Christmas Star in the night sky, the shining of the Christmas light in the night — all this is the sign that light breaks into the darkness. Though we see about us the darkness of unrest, of family discord, of class struggle, of competitive jealousy and of national hatred, the light shall shine and drive it out. Wherever the Christmas Child is born in a heart, wherever Jesus begins his earthly life anew — that is where the life of God's love and of God's peace dawns again.

— Emmy Arnold 11

