

CLOSING PRAYER:

~ Prayer for the 4th 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 [office] 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.

OLC “ADOPT A FAMILY” PROGRAM:

Our Adopt a Family is in great need this year. We still have 13 families who have not been adopted. For many years, Our Lady Chapel community has worked with St. Adalbert Parish in adopting families to help them celebrate the Christmas Season. St. Adalbert identifies families — most often single parent, below poverty level families; we are given the grade levels of the children & other family information, so that you can purchase gifts appropriate to each member.

As we did last year, we are procuring gift cards from various places, and the families will be purchasing the gifts for their families. This is a project that the entire family can get involved in. Families can be matched according to family size, ages, etc. It was truly inspiring. **Please call Patty at the Chapel Office [440-473-3560 or szanislop@gilmour.org]. The lists are in the chapel office now. “Adopt-a-Family” gifts need to be in our hands by Friday, December 23rd.**

SCHEDULE OF ADVENT/CHRISTMAS SERVICES:

- **Thursday, December 15 — Communal Penance Service at 7:00 PM**
- **Sunday, December 20 — Decoration of the Chapel for Christmas** following the 10 AM Mass
- **Saturday, December 24 — 4:00 PM — Christmas Eve Mass**
- **Sunday, December 25 — Christmas Day Mass at 10:00 AM**
- **Saturday, December 31 — New Year’s Eve Mass at 5:00 PM**
- **Sunday, January 1 — Sunday Family Mass at 10:00 AM**

CHRISTMAS FLOWERS:

During this Christmas season, we again are accepting memorial donations to help deflect the cost of our Christmas Flowers. We pray that our floral decorations and this season remind all of us of those special relationships which we hold close to our heart. Please keep the following people in your prayers: **In memory of Roger Mallik, Gil Plavcan, Sadie Tackla, Thomas Hughes, the Blazek and Rezabek Families.** If you would like to make a memorial offering, please place it in an envelope marked “Memorial Offering, Christmas Decorations”, along with the names of your loved ones that you would like to remember, and give to Father John or place it in the offering basket. **The collections baskets are at the center doors of the chapel.** God bless all of you.

**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. This year, New Year’s Eve falls on a Saturday. **Our Mass on Saturday, December 31st is at 5 PM. Our Mass on New Year’s Day will be as usual — 10 AM.** Please plan on

**FAITH EDUCATION:**

Faith Education meets next on Sunday, January 8th] and then again on Sunday, January 22nd at 8:45 AM. There will be no class on Sunday December 18th and 25th or January 1st due to Christmas Break. As has been our custom in the past, our Faith Education Classes are followed by our 10 AM Mass which is held in the chapel. **If you have any questions, please contact Patty in the Chapel Office [440-473-3560].** Thank you.

**PRAYER REQUESTS:**

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

PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:

- For a person who is struggling with mental health issues.
- For Ethel Nagy, mother of Lazlo Nagy, grandmother of Rich [*16] and Josh Nagy., who is seriously ill.
- For Carol Lowen, mother of Denise Shade, grandmother of Madeline, Michael, and Charles Shade, who is undergoing treatment for Breast Cancer.
- For Kim Clark, who is undergoing treatment for an aggressive form of cancer.
- For Beverly Jacklitch, mother of Kitchen Associate, Susan Jacklitch, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Paula Smith, mother of Tyler [*10] and Alec [*13] Smith, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Jacqueline Schmidt, [*13], Lower School toddler instructor, who is recovering from foot surgery.
- For Findley Stay, husband of former Gilmour Instructor, Emily Stay, father of Allen Stay [*87], who is undergoing treatment for a serious blood disorder.
- For Andy Andino, Sr., father of Music Director, Andy Andino, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Jill Shemory, mother of Adam [*08], who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For David Martin, who is recovering from triple Bypass Surgery

FOR THE DECEASED:

- For Mary Sarver, mother of Janet [*77] and David [*79] Sarver [Birthday]
- For Patrick Lysobey, cousin of Lower School Religion Instructor, Nora Joyce.
- For Maevie Simon, cousin of Lower School Art Teacher, Eileen Sheehan.
- For Matthew Totarella [*96], brother of Denise Totarella DeLuca [*94], uncle of Katie DeLuca [*26], nephew of Richard Lavigna [*78]
- For Patricia Lewis, grandmother of Liam [*21] and Charlotte [*24] Ottaway.
- For Boniface Kwangu
- For Sister Linda Bellemore, C.S.C.
- For Sister Maureen Cahill, C.S.C.
- For Sister Barbara Kleck, C.S.C.
- For Sister Veronica Blasko, S.N.D.
- For Louis Figueroa, adoptive-father of Music Director, Andy Andino.
- For Joseph DiTullio, grandfather of Johnny Ryan, C.S.C
- For John Morley, grandfather of Sadie [*23] and Henry [*28] Morley.
- For John Murphy [*58], brother of Michael Murphy [*60]
- For Todd King [*87], brother of Christie King Cox [*91], brother-in-law of Rob Cox [*80]
- For Sister Marcelle Frizzie, C.S.C.
- For Tina DiBona, aunt of Kayla Channell [*25]
- For Stephen Kucmanic.
- For Tony Masci

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].

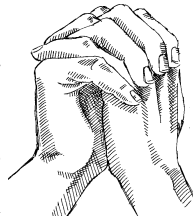


PRAYER REQUESTS:

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

PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:

- For Lyle Schulte, who is recovering from Lung Transplant surgery.
- For Toni Gjonaj, sister-in-law of Marketing Associate, Mary Stretar, who is recovering from a stroke.
- For Baylea O'Brian, friend of former Gilmour Teacher, Erin Thompson, who is undergoing treatment for Hodgkins Lymphoma
- For Fred Miller, uncle of Jessica Hammer Debick ['09], and brother in law of Pete Hammer ['78], who is recovering from open heart surgery.
- For Brother Thomas Moser, C.S.C., who is undergoing medical treatment
- For Lincoln Rhode, 6 year old son of Matthew Rhode ['96], grandson of Ray ['51] and Noreen Rhode, nephew of Patrick ['88] and Chris ['93] Rhode, who is undergoing continued treatment for a stroke
- For Walter Carey, who is undergoing treatment for leukemia.
- For Pat Malak, who is seriously ill.
- For Carol Triplett, sister of Linda McGraw, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Judy Collins, aunt of Chief Academic Officer, Elizabeth Edmondson, great-aunt of Mollie ['21] and Abbie ['23] Edmondson, who is undergoing treatment for brain cancer.
- For Madeleine Popp, mother of Gilmour CFO, Kathy Popp, who is ill.
- For Marina McCarter, grandmother of Aaron ['25] and Mason ['28] McCarter, who is ill
- For Michael Bares, brother of James ['80] Bares and Religion Instructor, Eileen Pryatel, uncle of Michael ['08, Meghan ['13] , and Kevin ['15] Pryatel, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Susan Plavcan, sister-in-law of Linda McGraw, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Matthew Gebhart, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For John Roddy, brother of Tim Roddy ['87], brother of Mary Roddy-Stretar, Marketing Associate at Gilmour, and cousin of Daniel ['83], Mike ['85], and Matt ['86] Roddy, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For James Law, husband of LS resource associate, Elana Law, who is undergoing treatment for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- For Fletcher Linsz, brother of Logan Linsz ['26], who is undergoing treatment for Hodgkin Lymphoma.
- For Michael Nestor ['98], who is undergoing treatment for a rare form of 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 Bernice Girgash, aunt of Basketball Coach and Counselor, Dan DeCrane, and great-aunt of Mackenzie DeCrane ['36], who is undergoing treatment for cancer..
- 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 Chiacchiari, mother of Mark ['94], mother-in-law of Michelle DeBacco ['96], grandmother of Aurelia ['28], and Olivia ['30] Chiacchiari, 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.

**A REFLECTION ON THIS WEEK'S THEME:**

Today is the fourth Sunday in Advent. Mary's days of physical pregnancy are drawing to an end. Her days of longing, anxiety, heaviness, weariness, discomfort and joy will soon be over. Mary will give birth. As directed, Joseph will name him "Jesus" [Matthew 1:18-24]. Each of us has also been impregnated with holy longing, desire and anticipatory joy waiting for Christ to be born — alive in me. Mary's days of pregnancy are numbered. My days of pregnancy are timeless. My belly and my heart bulge with the Christ who continues to squirm, wiggle and at times kick me into awareness of his presence within me — physically, mentally and spiritually. Each of us has the privilege of birthing Christ every moment of every day. Like Mary and Joseph, each of us is invited to share in the same rich, deep faith, trust and perpetual inner joy!

In our North American culture, we don't do longing very well — immediate gratification is our usual style. Waiting is for the "poor"; longing is a frustration to be relieved by a presumed right of purchase. I wish that people longed for the celebration of the birth of Jesus as much as they long for the semester to be over in school or college; or the ultimate victory of the Cleveland Browns. Perhaps we are too accustomed to the story and the reality of His birth. Perhaps we have too many comforts, warmth of clothing, and nourishing food to really want! We need to acquire the inquisitiveness of the shepherds, the searching of the Wise Men, and the wondering of Joseph and Mary.

Pray for a sense of emptiness in your life — a place in your Inn. Allow the experiences of "not having" to be a kind of having. Nature abhors a vacuum — our hearts ache for completion. Long for that peace of soul that accompanies our unique ways of hungering.

What's in a name? The readings for this 4th Week in Advent begin with a short conversation between the prophet, Isaiah, and a trembling king [Isaiah 7:10-14]. As in our present time, warring was a popular past-time between Israel and its surrounding neighbors. God had promised that Judah and Israel would be spared throughout this turmoil, and King Ahaz was relieved to hear this. When Isaiah asks Ahaz to ask for a sign to show that God will do as he promised, Ahaz does not want to do that.

But the prophet, Isaiah, gives Ahaz a second comforting word — not only will the two kingdoms be safe, but the future will be safe as well — all because a young woman will give the Davidic family-line a son whose name will be "God-Is-With-Us". Ahaz does not want to tempt God. God wants to affirm that God is faithful to past promises and future fruitfulness. God is with us now and in the years to come.

What's in a name? Matthew's Gospel [1:18-24] plunges us deep into the mystery of "God-With-Us". We do not like mystery very much — we want to know exactly how things work, and how things will happen. Joseph also wanted to know. We don't deal with dreams very well either. Joseph had a mystery and a dream and trusted through them both. When an angel — we don't deal well with angels either — addressed Joseph as "son of David" we hear how Matthew intends to affirm that Jesus is from the "Rod of Jessie" — the royal lineage. Joseph trusts the angel, and a young girl is found with child in some mysterious, angelic way.

What's in a name? There is plenty. The child to be born will have a name — "He Who-Saves-His-People-From-Their-Sins" — Jesus. Matthew then affirms this all by referring to what the prophet Isaiah had said to King Ahaz — He is Emmanuel, God with Us — the One Who is to save His people from their sins. He is with us now and for our fruitful futures.

Ahaz received a promise. Mary received a promise. Joseph receives a promise — and all three do not ask for verifying credentials or exact signs of coming attractions. Joseph wakes up and takes Mary into his home. Wakening and welcoming is all we have been invited to during these Advent days. Ahaz had to trust what could not be seen. Mary trusted what could not be physically experienced. Joseph



CAMP GILMOUR IS BACK FOR WINTER CAMP 2022:

Camp Gilmour is hosting six one-day camps for campers ages 5-12 during winter break. Campers can return to campus and renew old friendships, make new ones and have a great time! Winter Camp has something for everyone! Join us for seasonal games and crafts, swimming, ice skating, field trips and a New Year’s party.

Camp is in session from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. on the following dates: Tuesday, December 20, Wednesday, December 21, Thursday, December 22, Tuesday, December 27, Wednesday, December 28, and Thursday, December 29. Each day is a separate camp. Registration opens November 11th. Sign up today for one or all six days at gilmour.org/wintercamp!

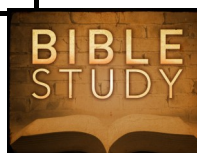


SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:

Sunday, December 18: 4 th Week in Advent	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream
Monday, December 19:	Check with Office for time
Tuesday, December 20:	Check with Office for time
Wednesday, December 21:	Check with Office for time
Thursday, December 22:	Check with Office for time
Friday, December 23:	Check with Office for time
Saturday, December 24: Christmas Eve	4:00 PM In Person & Live Stream
Sunday, December 25: Christmas Day	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream

NEXT BIBLE STUDY — TUESDAY, DECEMBER 28th:

Our next Virtual Bible Study will be on Wednesday, December 28th 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: Jesus as Emmanuel — God with us

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..

GOD WAITS FOR YOU:

Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is the most tender of friends with souls who seek to please Him. His goodness knows how to proportion itself to the smallest of His creatures as to the greatest of them. Be not afraid then in your solitary conversations, to tell Him of your miseries, fears, worries, of those who are dear to you, of your projects, and of your hopes. Do so with confidence and with an open heart.

—St. Damien of Molokai

ANSWERING THE CALL:

The New Testament reading for this 4th Week in Advent is taken from Paul’s letter to the Church at Rome [1:1-7] — the longest and most theologically significant of Paul’s letters. It is addressed to a community that he did not establish — but one which he intended to visit. Paul introduces himself under three designations — [1] a “slave” who glories in accepting Christ as his master; [2] an “apostle” sent by the Lord to deliver a message; and [3] as one “set apart” to preach the Gospel of God.

For Paul, the Gospel focuses on Jesus Christ, the son of King David according to the flesh and the Son of God established in power through the resurrection. It was the risen Christ who bestowed on Paul “the grace of apostleship” to bring “the obedience of faith” to all the Gentiles — including the “beloved of God” in Rome, who are “called to belong to Jesus Christ” and “to be holy.” Paul completes his introduction with a prayer that God the Father and Jesus the Lord will grant the Christians in Rome the gift of grace and peace.

Let us explore what spiritual advice we can glean from what Paul writes. Like Paul, we are called to make Christ central in our lives, serving him as our Master and sharing in his mission. A 50-year-old cradle Catholic who practiced his faith by carefully observing Church laws made a retreat which transformed his church-centered piety into a Christ-centered spirituality that includes a new personal relationship with the Lord and his call to serve those in need.



Paul had a core paschal spirituality based on the conviction that we are saved by the death and resurrection of Christ. God the Father raised the crucified Jesus to a new glorified life as the Son of God in power. A grandmother with a predominantly Good Friday piety centered on the intense suffering of Jesus read comments by Pope Francis that helped her develop a more Easter oriented spirituality focused on the joy of the resurrection.

The apostle to the Gentiles reminds us that we are all called to be holy. By virtue of our baptism we share in the life of Christ and in his mission to spread the kingdom in the world. The path to holiness passes through the area of our daily activities. When a single father of two grade school age girls learned more about the universal call to holiness, he used his demanding parental duties to enrich his spiritual life, becoming more patient, tolerant, and prayerful.

What specific guidance can you get from the what Paul writes today?

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

PRAYER REQUESTS:

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

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:

- For the Holy Cross Religious in Haiti, and for the people of that country, which is under siege because of political and civil strife.
- For a family going through a difficult time.
- For an end to violence and racial injustice in our society.
- 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.

READING SCRIPTURE WITH A GOSPEL MENTALITY:

Isaiah the prophet's prediction to King Ahaz is probably the most misunderstood passage in the entire Bible [Isaiah 7:10-14]. Beginning historically with Matthew's quote of Isaiah when the angel is speaking to Joseph [Matthew 1:18-24], people throughout the ages have presumed that Isaiah has Jesus of Nazareth in mind when he proclaims these words to Judah's 8th century BCE King Ahaz — "The virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel." Nothing could be clearer.

Yet, there is no way to get around the late Raymond Brown's contention that there are no predictions of Jesus — as we know Jesus — anywhere in the Hebrew Scriptures. And all scripture scholars throughout the ages agree with Brown. First they argue that Ahaz needed his sign yesterday — not 700 years in the future. Second, the Hebrew word — *almah* — which we Christians have gratuitously translated as "virgin" simply refers to a woman who has not yet had a child. Certainly virgins fit that category; but so do pregnant women who have yet to deliver their first child. These experts conclude the "*almah*" in this context is Mrs. Ahaz, and Emmanuel their future son Hezekiah, who would rule so well it would be like having God among us. Isaiah is simply assuring Ahaz that his wife's pregnancy is the Lord's sign that the king's family won't be annihilated if he refuses to join an alliance against Assyria.

It certainly is not difficult to understand how the early Christians could have looked back on this — and other passages of the Hebrew [Old Testament] Scriptures — and insist that not only Jesus' message, but Jesus himself, was prefigured in the Hebrew Scriptures. Along with Matthew, even our earliest Christian author, Paul, presumes this to be a fact. He tells the church in Rome that he's been "set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised previously through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures" [Romans 1:1-7]. For many Christians, the Hebrew Scriptures basically fill the role of Johnny Carson's sidekick Ed McMahon, announcing: "Now here's Jesus!" One way Jesus' first followers defended their acceptance of him as Messiah was to claim that if their fellow Jews read their Bible correctly, they would also see it predicted Jesus and his message.

Even if today we know more about ancient history and the original intention of our sacred authors than Christians did 2,000 years ago, we still must appreciate the spirituality of those who preceded us in the faith. Unlike some of our own faith, theirs was biblically rooted. I presume Paul, following the standard exegesis of his day and age, believed many of the prophets foretold the coming of Jesus as Messiah. But on the other hand, when he spoke about the "gospel of God" being proclaimed through the prophets, he hit the prophetic nail on the head.

Without ever mentioning Jesus of Nazareth, biblical prophets foreshadowed his message and ministry, insisting that in God's eyes, people are more important than institutions, rules, and regulations. When those Jews whose faith dovetailed with the faith of the ancient Hebrew prophets encountered this itinerant Galilean carpenter, they saw and heard things most people missed. Take Joseph in Matthew's Gospel [1:18-24]. He experienced God working in ways they could never have anticipated. They also received an "annunciation," convincing them that this particular teacher was completely different from all other teachers.

Though largely ignored by preachers, scholars insist that biblical annunciations are literary devices employed by our sacred authors to make certain their readers understand the meaning of the events they narrate. Among other things, that means if we have a prophetic mentality, we'll personally experience many more than just the three gospel annunciations.

—taken from the writings of Father Roger Karban, which appear on the internet

**A WISE REMINDER:**

16 A friend may be waiting behind a stranger's face.

—Maya Angelou

trusted what he could see — Mary, who to all appearances seemed the same as before the dream.

Now we stand at the threshold of the Stable. Our "stable-ability" is literally whether we can stand in the face of promises, mystery, and see beyond appearances. Joseph took into his life more than his wife Mary — there was a Mystery inside her which he welcomed as well. He could see what he could see, but there was more than met the eye there.

We live the "stable" life ourselves. God has made promises to us which invite us to see beyond appearances and take mysteries into our unstable lives. They become unstable by our demanding signs which can give us a false sense of security. For as joyful as these days of Advent and Christmas can be, there is a hidden and dangerous aspect.

We may want to approach the straw-filled stable supported by crutches of certainty and our GPS Systems to make sure of things, just the way we approach any call to trust. But the reality is that when we come to the stable, we meet Joseph there with nothing but his faith hanging out. We meet Mary there, also, with her faith hanging out, smiling compassionately at our falsifications. What's in a name? Our name is the "us" with whom God is. Our name is "His People" who will be saved from their sins. What's in a name? We would be there with our impatience hanging out and somehow invited to enter into the stable-life of seeing the presence of the Promised One.

As we enter into this final week in Advent, we are invited to share in the same rich, deep faith, trust and perpetual inner joy that Mary and Joseph did! Imagine that! Emmanuel — God is with us!

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

SERVING THE LORD IN THE POOR — JANUARY 21st:

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. This is a wonderful way to serve others. Please consider this opportunity.

WE NEED HELP:

Gilmour Academy is looking for reliable, skilled maintenance workers to perform upkeep and essential tasks throughout our campus. In this position, you will be responsible for a variety of duties, including repairs, and event set-ups and take-downs. Candidates must be reliable and self-motivated. The schedule for this position can be flexible — full-time, part-time, days, evenings, weekends. Contact Gilmour Academy's Human Resources Department at (440) 473-8000 x1004 or visit gilmour.org/about/careers for more details.



ASK FOR A SIGN:

Many, many years ago — perhaps thousands of years ago — an obscure middle-eastern tribe suddenly realized that God was speaking to them. And what they heard God saying was this: “I will be your God. You will be my people. I will never leave you, no matter what; even if you should leave me, I will still be with you.” People heard this long before recorded history began. It was heard by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was heard by Moses on Mt. Sinai, and by the people in the desert as they fled Pharaoh’s forces.

The prophets hear this and their chief responsibility was to remind the people of this covenant and the part they had to play. The people’s response was to be faithful to God in return and to show this fidelity by being faithful to one another.

In the eighth century before Jesus was born, the Kingdom of Judah was sundered, split in two. The Southern Kingdom, under King Ahaz, felt threatened by the Northern Kingdom and by the Assyrian forces from the East. King Ahaz called in the prophet Isaiah and asked: “What shall I do?” The prophet gave a simple and unexpected response: “Ask God for a sign.” The king said: “I couldn’t possibly do that.” And the prophet said: “God will give you a sign anyway. This will be the sign: a young woman will have a child whose name will be Emmanuel which means God is with us” [Isaiah 7:10-14].

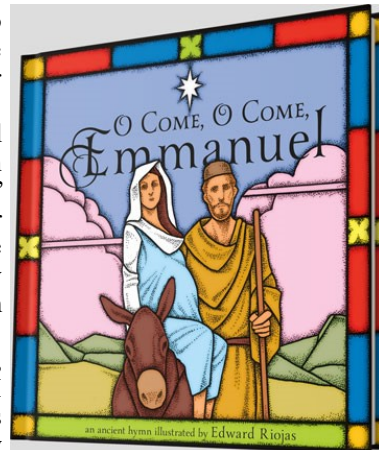
Now we fast forward 700 and some years. The scene shifts from the trappings and splendor of the royal palace in Jerusalem to the simple home of the village carpenter in a provincial town of Galilee. The carpenter’s name is Joseph, and he is having a restless night because his soul is anguished. His engaged fiancée — Mary — is going to have a child, and he knows he is not the father. What to do? He is a just man — just in two different senses: he cannot approve of adultery which seems to be the situation, and which of course is forbidden; but he is also just in the Biblical sense. He is just in the way that God is just. He wants to do the right thing and, at the same time, do nothing to hurt this woman he loves. So he decides to divorce her quietly and hope she can have her child in secret without suffering the sanctions of the law.

Finally sleep comes, and with sleep, a dream. “Joseph” an angel says, “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. Her child is from the Holy Spirit. Call him Jesus because he will save his people.” And Matthew, who is recounting this wondrous event, interprets for us: “All this happened to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: The virgin shall be with child and give birth to a son and they shall call him Emmanuel, a name which means God is with us” [Matthew 1:18-24].

In their times of trouble, God did not tell Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, I am going to take your troubles away. God simply said: I am with you. God did not tell King Ahaz he would conquer his enemies — in fact the king did not conquer his enemies. God simply said: “I am with you.” God did not tell Joseph there would be no problems because of this child — indeed there were many problems. God simply said: “I am with you.”

On this Fourth Week in Advent, God is still saying to us what God has been saying for thousands of years — but perhaps now with a slight twist — ever since I became one of you, God says, I know what it is to be in pain. I am with you in your sufferings, I am with you in your tears, in your sickness, and in your dying. But I am also with you in your joys and in your happiness. I am in the warmth of a friendly embrace. I am in the brightness of a child’s smiling face.

Through the Advent season we sing: “O come, O come, Emmanuel.” At Christmas time, we sing: “O come to us, abide with us, our Lord, Emmanuel.” Our Lord Emmanuel has come to us, will come to us today and every day of our lives. Our task today and every day of our lives, is to welcome him with generous and open hearts —perhaps even with open arms as we reach out to one another, to those in

**MAKING ROOM FOR EMMANUEL:**

History tells us that Constantine became a catechumen after a symbol of Christ helped him win a crucial battle. Then, he waited until he was on his deathbed to be baptized. Baptism was a major commitment; until he knew his end was near, he didn't want to assume the demands of Christianity. He seemed a bit like King Ahaz, who rather ironically told Isaiah that he would not “tempt” God by asking for the sign that God had already offered him. Ahaz didn’t want a sign that might require his conversion.

The 4th Week in Advent abounds in signs — they all focus our celebration of Emmanuel, God with us.

First is the sign of Ahaz: “The virgin shall conceive and bear a son — Emmanuel” [Isaiah 7:10-14]. Who could ask for a better Christmas prophecy! Unfortunately, Isaiah had no intention of speaking about a messiah like Jesus. The prophecy referred to his own time and a son to be born to Ahaz, a wicked ruler who was not particularly interested in an heir who would be a living sign of God’s presence among the people.

Then we hear Matthew’s account of the “birth of Jesus Christ.” Matthew places his account within the framework of a very artificial genealogy of Jesus — created to show that Jesus is the high point of salvation history. Seen in this context, we realize that Matthew is not talking about a nativity — he’s chronicling God’s ongoing outreach to humanity.

As soon as we have grasped the messianic significance of Jesus’ origins, Matthew reminds us that Emmanuel’s coming will feel problematic and conflictual. Theology and spirituality aside, there is a very real, practical problem — Mary is pregnant with a child Joseph did not engender. Joseph has to decide between righteous obedience to God’s covenant in the law and the command of an angel who came to him in a dream.

Joseph received no irrefutable sign. All he had to go on was the dream and the intuition that God’s future promised more than he could accomplish. With that, Joseph becomes a sign for the future. The law and tradition offer guides, but, as Pope Francis teaches, the word of God is free and unruly, accomplishing “what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking” [*Evangeliū Gaudium*, #22].

The Scripture Readings for this 4th Week in Advent are designed to remind us that encountering Emmanuel — God with us — is both very demanding and immensely surprising. Like his father Abraham, Joseph ventured into the risky unknown, trusting that, no matter what it would cost him, God and the divine promises were bigger and better than his wildest imaginings. Acting from the risky obedience of faith, Joseph adopted God’s plan. Staking his life on God’s promise, he anticipated the mercy his adopted son would offer; he took Mary into his home and accepted the fact that his life would never be what he expected.

Advent calls us, like Joseph, to be ready for unexpected, often un hoped-for, change. God offers more than we could ever ask or imagine. Perhaps the lesson of Advent is that it’s not so much we who are waiting, but God who comes to our door and appears in dreams, asking: “Will you, like Joseph, adopt my plan? Will you make room for Emmanuel in ways you’ve never imagined?”

—taken from the writings of Sister Mary McGlone, C.S.J., which appears on the internet

REVEALING GIFTS:

Everyone whom I allow to touch me in my weakness and help me to be faithful to my journey to God’s home will come to realize that he or she has a gift to offer that may have remained hidden for a very long time. To receive help, support, guidance, affection, and care may well be a greater call than that of giving all these things because in receiving I reveal the gift to the givers and a new life together can begin.

—Henri Nouwen

told. His wonders are beyond our imagination. Trust in Him and behold His wonders, and live in His happiness.

One week from now — on the Feast of Christmas — we will be giving tokens of our love to the people who mean so much to us. We will be giving out Christmas presents. Now, we can give those we love all sorts of things, but we cannot give them happiness. Only God gives happiness. And He gives happiness to those who entrust their lives to Him.

Behold Jesus.

See and understand.

Behold happiness.

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

READINGS FOR THE WEEK:

- Monday:** Judges 13:2-25, Luke 1:5-15
- Tuesday:** Isaiah 7:10-14, Luke 1:26-38
- Wednesday:** Song of Songs 2:8-14, Zephaniah 3:14-18, Luke 1:39-45
- Thursday:** 1 Samuel 1:24-28, Luke 1:46-56
- Friday:** Malachi 3:1-24, Luke 1:57-66
- Saturday:** 2 Samuel 7:1-16, Luke 1:67-79
- Christmas:** Isaiah 9:1-6, Titus 2:11-14, Luke 2:1-14
Isaiah 62:11-2, Titus 3:4-7, Luke 2:15-20
Isaiah 52:7-10, Hebrews 1:1-6, John 1:1-14

EUCCHARISTIC MINISTERS:

We are currently discerning a new group of Eucharistic Ministers who would undergo training within the next month. If you feel that the Lord is calling you to this ministry, we would be delighted to include you in that ministry here at Our Lady Chapel. Both adults and teens [must be a Senior in High School] are welcome to participate in this very special ministry. We are in need of ministers for both our Saturday evening and Sunday morning Masses. **Contact Father John or the chapel office [440-473-3560] if you feel called to this ministry.** We are always in need of Eucharistic Ministers.



CHAPEL ENVELOPES:

There are many ways that you can support our Holy Cross Mission and support Our Lady Chapel. You can place your offering at the door of the chapel as you enter; you can use our on-line donation link; or you can mail in your offerings to the Chapel itself — whatever best serves your needs. If you need a supply of envelopes, please pick them up off the table in the Narthex of the Chapel when you come to Mass. Or you can call the office or stop in to request them. **If you would like us to send you a supply of**

WEEKLY OFFERING:

Thank you to those who have begun to send in weekly offerings. We really appreciate it. Thanks for not forgetting about us.

Offerings-----[Saturday, December 10]----[Mass, Online, Mail-in]----- \$ 785.00

Offerings-----[Sunday, December 11]----- \$ 455.00

need, to those who come to us for help. He is with them, too, our Lord Emmanuel.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus we hear the words of the angels to Joseph, to Mary, to Zechariah, to the shepherds and to countless others: “Do not be afraid.” In spite of wars and terrorists, hatred and violence, in spite of storms and floods, cold and hunger: “Do not be afraid, for I am with you. I will always be with you, no matter what.”

—taken from the writings of Father Leo Murray, S.J., which appear on the internet

THE GREATEST GIFT

If we have really been following the readings and other texts of the liturgy during the first weeks of Advent, we see that the Church has been inviting us to focus our attention on that day when, in the fullness of time, Christ will return in glory. In the final days of Advent, however, the focus shifts and we recall those prophecies, people, and events that preceded the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem more than two millennia ago. In the readings for the Fourth Week in Advent, we hear God making a promise to King Ahaz — through the words of the prophet Isaiah — that virgin shall bear a child and how that promise was fulfilled in Mary, the betrothed of Joseph of Nazareth [Isaiah 7:10-14].

These are stories that we know well. Some of us learned the story of the Jesus’ birth through Christmas pageants or holiday TV specials. For others, it was Bible stories, attending church services at Christmas, and in classic carols and hymns. In a sense, the Christmas story has become part of our spiritual DNA, and because of that, there is the risk that we lose sight of how shocking these events really were to those who were living those events and we miss what they reveal about the mercy and love of God.

However, if we are able to take time to pray with and reflect on the Scripture readings, we begin to recognize a thread — a central idea — pulling these wonderful texts together. And that thread is Gift.

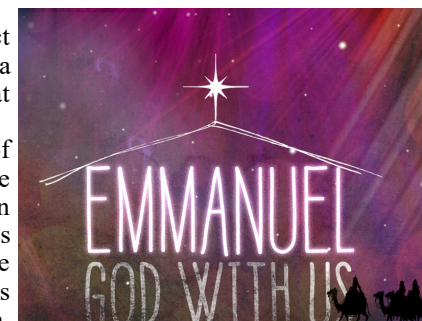
Through the prophet, Isaiah, God makes the promise of Emmanuel who will lead the Chosen People in freedom despite the king’s unwillingness to even ask for anything from God. In Matthew’s Gospel, God’s angelic messenger interrupts Joseph’s sleep, breaking into one of the most ordinary human acts with the most extraordinary news [Matthew 1:18-24]. And St. Paul names the grace and call that he himself received and which he, in turn, shares with the Christians of Rome [Romans 1:1-7]. In each instance, we are being confronted with the truth that God offers us deliverance, grace, and mercy freely, simply out of love for us.

In an Advent reflection, spiritual writer Loretta Ross-Gotta remarked: “Jesus observed: ‘Without me you can do nothing’ [John 15:5]. Yet we act, for the most part, as though without us, God can do nothing. We think we have to make Christmas come — which is to say we think we have to bring about the redemption of the universe on our own. ‘Oh, but nothing will get done,’ you say. ‘If I don’t do it, Christmas won’t happen.’ And we crowd out Christ with our fretful fears” [see *Watch for the Light: Reflections for Advent and Christmas*].

How much time and effort do we waste holding our breath, treading water as we navigate wave after wave of expectation and responsibility? Rather than trying to hold on to some semblance of control or the sense that we have to keep things moving forward, God is inviting us to let something new come to birth within us.

Remember: the one who is both Giver and Gift asks us only for open heart and a willing spirit. Dwell in the mystery that is being made present to us in the liturgies of Advent and Christmas — as Paul writes: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father / and the Lord Jesus Christ”.

—taken from the writings of Brother Silas Henderson, S.D.S., which appear on the internet



EMMANUEL:

If Jesus is our Savior, why is the world still such a mess? If Jesus is the King of the Universe, why is so much of the universe still characterized by violence and hatred and evil? This is an important question because in a few days we are going to celebrate the birth of the Savior, and it is essential that we understand how this birth of Jesus is good news to us.

I think we realize that the central message of Jesus was to proclaim the Kingdom of God — a Kingdom of justice and peace, a Kingdom of forgiveness and love, a Kingdom where the lion and the lamb could lay down together, where there would be no more sorrow or pain, no more hatred or death. That is the Kingdom of God which we have been promised. But where is it? What we find when we look at our world is war and terrorism, misunderstanding and hatred.

So if Jesus is Savior, where is the salvation? We would rather not face this question. But questions such as these, rise spontaneously from those who confront evil. You have heard them as well as I have. Why did my husband have to die? Why do I have to live in fear of terrorism? Why did my marriage come to an end? Why does my daughter have cancer? Questions such as these rise spontaneously from those who suffer. They are a way of asking: If the Savior is born and the Savior is real, where is the salvation? If Christ, in fact, is our Savior, why does so much evil still remain in our world?

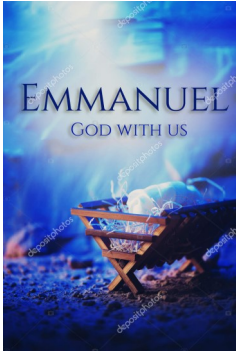
Our tradition, of course, points towards an answer. We believe that we shall share in the Kingdom after our death. When we enter heaven, we will have complete happiness with God. We also believe that when Jesus comes again at the end of the time, He will establish God's Kingdom here on earth. The Tradition says to us that the Kingdom is a Kingdom to come — a future Kingdom. It will come in heaven or at the end of time. We know this, we believe this, but what good is that future Kingdom for those who must suffer today? Is there only future good news? Or is there present good news that we can claim in our own lives?

Here is where the true mystery of Christmas becomes evident. The Scripture Readings for this 4th Week in Advent point to it. Isaiah tells us that a Child will be born called Emmanuel [Isaiah 7:10-14], and Matthew in the Gospel makes it clear that Jesus is that Child [Matthew 1:18-24]. The name, Emmanuel, is important. It means God is with us. As we await the coming salvation, promised us in the future, our God is not aloof. Our God has chosen to take up our humanity. Our God is with us. As we deal with the loss of someone we love, in death, Jesus, who knows human sorrow and pain, is not indifferent. He is with us. As we cope with the fear of terrorism, Jesus, who knows human fear, is not unconcerned. He is with us. As we suffer from the rejection and failure of divorce, Jesus, who knows human rejection and failure is not somewhere else. He is with us. As we confront sickness in ourselves and in our families, Jesus, who has a human body, who felt pain, is not unconcerned. He is with us.

The Good News of the Christmas season is that as we await the full salvation that is to come — God is not far off. God did not choose to wait in some distant place until the Kingdom arrives. God became human. God, in Christ, took up our human nature in all of its frailty and brokenness. God, in Christ, experienced the broken nature of our world. The mystery of Christmas is that God became one of us and that God remains with us.

Now the promises are still real, and we do expect that someday in the future, we will enter the Kingdom and live in that perfection of God's peace and justice and love. But until that day, we are not alone. Until that day through all that we have to suffer and endure, Jesus is Emmanuel — God with us!

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



God, ask for a sign, and God will provide it.” Ahaz might have appeared to be holy and pious when he said: “I will not tempt God,” but actually what he was saying is that he did not want anyone telling him what choices to make. He certainly was not going to allow some prophet to determine his policies. He did not want to behold.

There is a temptation that we all have to react as Ahaz reacted when confronted with the action of God in our lives. We have a temptation that we rather trust in our own ability to find happiness than be exposed to God and be forced to reject the pseudo joy of the world. There is a temptation we all have not to behold. A number of years ago a young man told me that he had avoided Church because he knew that if he started taking his faith seriously, he would have to change his life. He said it took him years to realize that his immoral lifestyle did not bring him happiness. When he finally took the step to return to the Lord, everything changed. Others told him that he wasn't the same guy. He agreed. “That's right,” he said, “I'm happy now.” Perhaps all of us to some degree or other have avoided God. Perhaps there are times that we think that embracing God in our lives would cost too much. And, consequently, we ended up avoiding happiness. There is a temptation for all of us to act like Ahaz.

Back to Isaiah. Isaiah told Ahaz that God had a far greater enterprise than the immediate political situation Judah was in. God was concerned with saving all His people for all time — “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and name him Emmanuel.” Seven hundred years before the angel Gabriel came to the Virgin Mary, the King of Judah was told how God would accomplish His plan to be with His People for all time.

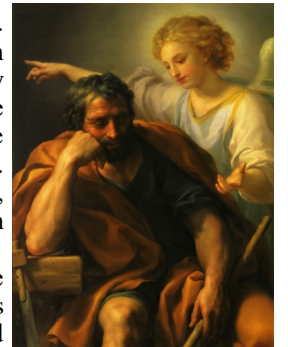
Only Ahaz did not want to behold. He did not want to trust in God.

In direct contrast to Ahaz, Matthew's Gospel presents Joseph — a man who was also faced with a dilemma. He was betrothed to a beautiful young girl and anxiously awaiting the time that she would be ready to leave her parents and come into his home. Following the custom of the day, the first stage of marriage had taken place when Mary was still very young. That was the betrothal ceremony. From that point, Mary was Joseph's wife, even though she still a virgin living with her parents. The marriage would be completed with the celebration of the entrance of Mary into Joseph's home. That is when they would have the big wedding feast, like Jesus would later attend with his disciples at Cana. There would be a great banquet and dancing and celebrating the new life of this couple and the new lives they hoped to bring into the world. It was exciting for Joseph.

Then it all came crashing down. Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant. But Joseph was an upright man, a just man. According to the common interpretation of the law, he could have declared that Mary was unfaithful, guilty of adultery, and had her put to death. Joseph could have had Mary killed, but he was a just man. He had a real relationship with God. The girl was young. He could not fathom God wanting her dead. He would just send Mary away. Joseph was open to the will of God. And because he was open to God in his life, because he trusted in God rather than his own plans, his own thoughts, Joseph was able to behold the wonders of God's love in the world.

Unlike Ahaz, Joseph chose the way of faith. And he chose well. And the baby was born. What must it have been like for Joseph to hold the King of Kings in his arms? What must it have been like for him to experience the Love of God become flesh? What must it have been like for him to realize that Mary was the polar opposite of his fears? She was not a sinner. She was the one who never sinned. What must it have been like to for Joseph to live in a home filled with the wonders of God? We know that Joseph protected his family, leading them to Egypt to avoid Herod. We know that Joseph returned to Nazareth where he cared for Jesus in his infancy and childhood — even teaching him how to be a carpenter. Joseph had to have been a very happy man, for happiness is found in the presence of God.

“Behold!” the Church tells us today. Behold where happiness is found. “Trust in God,” we are

**IMPORTANT NEWS:**

Never stop learning because life never stops teaching.

DON'T JUST LOOK; DON'T JUST SEE; BUT BEHOLD:

When I prepare young couples for marriage, I spend a session just on communications and problem solving. I begin the discussion by considering the various levels of communicating. I start with hearing. Hearing alone is not communicating. Someone could be engrossed in watching TV or reading the newspaper and not be paying any attention to what another person may be saying; yet if he or she is asked: "What did I just say?" they can respond with what they heard. That is shallow. I'll mention that a deeper communication is when someone is listening to the other person, attuned to what he or she is saying. But then I'll somewhat shock the couple by noting that listening is important, but not sufficient for a marriage. What they need to work towards is to bring their communication to a deeper level — the level of understanding. They do this by asking themselves: "Why?" Why is my husband or wife saying this? How can I respond not just to what is being said, but why it is being said? When a husband or wife says he or she really understands me, it doesn't just happen. That is a result of intense work.

Something similar takes place regarding our sense of vision. At its simplest level, we can look without paying that much attention to what we are seeing. Still, what we have seen is implanted somewhere in our mind, just as what we have heard is implanted somewhere in our mind even if we paid no attention to it. My guess is that the reason why detectives ask a person who is a witness to a crime to tell what they saw over and over again is to unveil something in their minds that they have not paid a whole lot of attention to. Maybe the third or fourth telling they might say: "Well, there was a guy there with a green bow-tie, but he wasn't part of the bank robbery." And now the police have a lead on someone. A man with a green bow tie was also present at another robbery.

Deeper than looking is seeing. Seeing, like listening, answers the question "What?" What am I seeing? The mind is focused. "I know what I saw," the witness to the crime says emphatically. "I know there was a man there with a green bow-tie. He seemed to be part of the robbers, even though he didn't make off with the money."

Seeing in this way, focusing on what is in front of us, is important, but there is an even deeper level of vision. That is the level we find in scripture — particularly in the readings of the Christmas Season. The deeper level is beholding. To behold is to see and understand. "Behold the virgin shall be with child," the Gospel of Matthew quotes Isaiah, only adding "behold." Understand what this is about. "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord," Mary responds [see Luke 1:38] — "I see, and I understand," she says, in the Gospel of Luke.

Joseph, in Matthew's Gospel, is a righteous man, unwilling to have Mary put to death for being pregnant. He falls asleep and, behold, an angel appears to him in his dreams. See and understand he is told. Shepherds were tending their flock, when the Angel of the Lord appeared to them and said: "Behold, I proclaim to you news of great joy. Go to Bethlehem. Find the infant in the manger. See and understand" [see Luke 2:10].

Behold!

King Ahaz in the Book of Isaiah the prophet did not want to behold. He did not want to behold the work of God. He would rather decide his own fate and that of his Kingdom, then trust in God. Ahaz's kingdom was the Kingdom of Judah, the southern of the two Hebrew Kingdoms. Here is what was happening: in the middle of the eighth century before Jesus, the powerful nation of Assyria was threatening to conquer its neighbors. The Northern Kingdom of the Hebrews, the Kingdom of Israel, had made a pact with Syria to go to war against Assyria. Israel was in an alliance with pagans, the Syrians. Ahaz considered joining Judah to this alliance, or possibly making an alliance with Assyria, and then conquer the Northern Kingdom and become king of all the Jews, like David and Solomon.

This is when the prophet Isaiah came to him and told him to stay at peace and trust in God. Ahaz balked at this. He had his own plan. So Isaiah told him: "If you want proof that my message is from

**ANSWERING THE CALL:**

The New Testament reading for this 4th Week in Advent is taken from Paul's letter to the Church at Rome [1:1-7] — the longest and most theologically significant of Paul's letters. It is addressed to a community that he did not establish — but one which he intended to visit. Paul introduces himself under three designations — [1] a "slave" who glories in accepting Christ as his master; [2] an "apostle" sent by the Lord to deliver a message; and [3] as one "set apart" to preach the Gospel of God.

For Paul, the Gospel focuses on Jesus Christ, the son of King David according to the flesh and the Son of God established in power through the resurrection. It was the risen Christ who bestowed on Paul "the grace of apostleship" to bring "the obedience of faith" to all the Gentiles — including the "beloved of God" in Rome, who are "called to belong to Jesus Christ" and "to be holy." Paul completes his introduction with a prayer that God the Father and Jesus the Lord will grant the Christians in Rome the gift of grace and peace.

Let us explore what spiritual advice we can glean from what Paul writes. Like Paul, we are called to make Christ central in our lives, serving him as our Master and sharing in his mission. A 50-year-old cradle Catholic who practiced his faith by carefully observing Church laws made a retreat which transformed his church-centered piety into a Christ-centered spirituality that includes a new personal relationship with the Lord and his call to serve those in need.

Paul had a core paschal spirituality based on the conviction that we are saved by the death and resurrection of Christ. God the Father raised the crucified Jesus to a new glorified life as the Son of God in power. A grandmother with a predominantly Good Friday piety centered on the intense suffering of Jesus read comments by Pope Francis that helped her develop a more Easter oriented spirituality focused on the joy of the resurrection.

The apostle to the Gentiles reminds us that we are all called to be holy. By virtue of our baptism we share in the life of Christ and in his mission to spread the kingdom in the world. The path to holiness passes through the area of our daily activities. When a single father of two grade school age girls learned more about the universal call to holiness, he used his demanding parental duties to enrich his spiritual life, becoming more patient, tolerant, and prayerful.

What specific guidance can you get from the what Paul writes today?

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

LOVE DOES NO HARM:

How can there be so much joy, pleasure and beauty in life? How can there be so much pain, hurt, suffering, and death? Why and how have these things come to pass? What is God's intention for human life and for the rest of creation? Doesn't God will something more for us — a love that does no harm? Doesn't God will for us a compassionate and caring love, rather than a false love that strips humanity and creation of dignity? Can we experience such love in this life? Or do we have to wait until the hereafter — life after death? These are questions about the kingdom of God. They have to do with God's intention for the reign of God. They make us consider our own responsibility as participants in God's activity of a love that does no harm in the here and now.

The promise of the fulfillment of the Spirit's healing, creating presence on earth is woven together with apocalyptic hope in the midst of the daily work and struggles of life. The reign of the Spirit is an ever-present reality. The hereafter is in the here and now. We live into it in our everyday acts. God moves as the strength of life, present in history and creation. God as the strength of life is the power of life. Given such power, whom should we fear? That which is the very strength of life transforms fear into faith, salvation, and hope. It means that we do not have to accept injustice and abuse while we wait for some better, eternal life in a world beyond the present. We can live into a love that is eternal and does no harm in the here and now. The goal of the spiritual journey is to discover and move toward connectedness on ever new levels.

—Father Richard Rohr, O.F.M.

HOPE IN DARKNESS: THE TENSION OF JESUS' BIRTH IN A VIOLENT WORLD:

Not too long ago, a man sought to drive terror into students at Ohio State, so he took a machete and attacked students there. An innocent man was shot as he reached for his driver's license — a victim of racist violence at the hands of a person that was supposed to protect him. Men and women in uniform are attacked as tensions rise, and peaceful protests turn violent because of a few individuals that wanted to do harm rather than raise awareness. People in Ukraine are fighting for their lives and their country. And even in the seemingly trivial conversations on Twitter and Instagram, people scream at each other rather than listen.

Peace on earth and goodwill toward all? This Christmas season, it hardly seems so. We seem like we are a long way from that Silent Night. And as I reflect on my life, it feels like we have been marching toward this chaos for a while.

Way back when, when I was in middle school, I remember the broken sense of innocence as school leaders told us that two boys shot their fellow students in their high school in Colorado. They told us that we would need to start practicing "active shooter" drills at our school — and the world felt darker.

I remember walking into my World Cultures class my sophomore year of high school to find the television playing scenes of airplanes slamming into buildings as our teacher frantically told us what just happened on that September 11th morning. The word "terrorist" became a term we heard daily from that point on — and the world seemed less safe.

In college, I remember walking to one of my classes when I heard about a student on at Virginia Tech who violently assaulted several students and teachers on his campus with a weapon. Once more, we began to walk through "active shooter" drills in my courses, as we all were reminded how to escape a deadly situation.

This is only a small part of my history — and yours. Recently, we've been reminded of the horrific human capacity to sin, hurt, and destroy. The narratives take place in the United States and throughout the world. These events are horrific whenever they happen, but they seem to throw a darker shadow around Christmas. These events remind us how fragile life is — and how vulnerable we are. They frighten us. They leave us asking: "What is going on, Lord? Can't you come and make this right? Can't you come and fix this now? What are you waiting for?"

One of the oldest prayers in the Church is spoken in Advent. It is simple — "maranatha." In Aramaic, it is a call of longing — "Come, Lord Jesus." It is no surprise that in the early Church this expression had profound urgency amidst persecution and fear. A tension exists within Advent that we often ignore — a tension between the joy of the coming of Christ, and the reality that Christ comes into a broken world.

Jesus' coming is heralded by angels, and his birth is marked by the visit of kings. But then, the Gospel of Matthew speaks of a massacre of children under the age of two [Matthew 2:16-18]. The birth of our savior is marked with bloodshed. We get a clear view of why this child has been born — ultimately to give up his life for ours.

We don't like to focus on that in Advent. It should be a time of rejoicing and waiting to celebrate Christmas. But this year, our eyes must be directed toward that tension. It is the Advent tension between the manger and the cross. The tension between the Christ child, and Jesus who will come again at the end of history.

One of the most difficult realities for us to reconcile — especially in the Advent season — is the fact that though Jesus wins the victory over sin and death, the effects of sin still remain. Jesus tells us that He will come again to put an end to suffering and death, but that we have work to do between now and then.



When Jesus leaves the disciples with this mission, they went back into a world that was violent. In the years after Jesus' death almost all of the apostles were martyred. The temple was destroyed. A major war was fought. The people prayed: "Maranatha." And then they proclaimed the Gospel.

Ultimately, this is our hope in Advent; it is the hope that we bring to a broken world. Jesus is born into our brokenness — into a world messy with sin. Jesus is born in the midst of violence and bloodshed. Jesus comes to open the doors of eternal life for us. We remember that in Advent.

But we also look ahead in Advent. We recognize that our world is still broken and that we need to do the best we can to bring healing to our world while we wait for Jesus to bring full healing. We need to be peacemakers, even when the task seems impossible.

When we talk about "waiting" in Advent this is what we mean — we don't wait for Christmas — we remember the first Christmas because it points us to the second coming of Christ. The one where Jesus wins the final victory. We light Advent candles to remind ourselves that the darkness in this world will never cast out the light, and sometimes that light shines brightest in the darkness. Those candles may not light up an entire room, but they light up those closest to them. Even if we can't fix the entire world, we can bring people into that light.

That is the mission and the urgency of the prayer. We pray that Jesus will come, and pray for the grace to work in His name until that day. We trust that our work isn't in vain — even when it seems like it is. Even when all the good we do seems wiped out by a senseless act of violence. Even when the love we bring seems like it is overshadowed by hate. We know it isn't in vain because Jesus Christ is coming again, and we want to make His message known so that, when He does come, we won't be the only ones waiting. We will have shared this hope that sin and death and suffering are not the end, and that something great lies ahead of us. We will have helped other people prepare their hearts.

Until that day we pray and we work. We hope, and we share our hope. We weep with those that weep and rejoice with those that rejoice. We share Christ, and we pray: "Lord Jesus, come again. Find us ready to be led back home."

—taken from the writings of Joel Stepanik, a VP of LifeTeen

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. 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].**

**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 Szanislo, Lois Boyer, Tina Newton, Sharon Fidele, and Nora Joyce** 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.

**WISDOM:**

Don't let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.

—John Wooden