

CLOSING PRAYER:

~ A Christmas Prayer ~

God of infinite love,
 come into my life. Please?
 Take my hand,
 walk beside me,
 pat me on the back when I need it.
 When I fall down,
 help me to get back up.
 And when I am on my "high horse,"
 help me to get back down.
 Encourage me,
 inspire me,
 disarm me.

Broaden my vision.
 Expand my understanding.
 Remind me
 that I am a life-long learner.
 Inflammate my heart with love
 for all who enter
 the circle of my life —
 those I am naturally drawn to
 and those I struggle with.
 Listen to my cries,
 my sighs,
 my silence.
 Say yes to me.
 Say no to me.
 Feed me,
 need me.
 Hug me.
 Bug me.

Give me the grace
 to say I'm sorry.
 Give me the grace
 to say I forgive.
 Free me from the tendency
 to wrap around myself.
 Enlarge my world.
 Direct my attention
 to things that really matter.

Give me ears
 to hear "the cries of the poor" —
 those living in dire need,
 grave fear,
 chronic pain,
 profound grief,
 and utter loneliness.
 May I never become numb
 to the world's pain.
 Inspire me
 to find creative ways
 to bring more love
 and healing into our hurting world.

I know you love me as I am,
 but keep nudging me
 to be a better version
 of who I already am.
 Melt my coldness,
 smooth my rough edges.
 Be with me,
 weep with me,
 dance with me,
 laugh with me.
 Keep urging me to grow up.
 Keep urging me to be more childlike.

Bestow upon me
 an abundance of patience,
 but never let me be completely satisfied with
 the way things are.
 Deepen my trust in you.
 Increase my thirst for you.

I welcome you,
 Beloved Divine Intrusion,
 to come into my life every day,
 and into our beautiful
 and broken world.
 Amen.

—Sister Melanie Svoboda, S.N.D.

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.

CAMPUS MINISTRY OFFICE:

The Campus Ministry Office is located in **Our Lady Chapel**.
 phone: [440] 473-3560 [office] or 216-570-9276 [cell].

THE CHRISTMAS STORY:

Each year we hear again the ancient yet timeless Christmas story. Each year we retell the astonishing entrance that God made into our broken world, and we are moved in the very bowels of our being by God's capacity to surprise us with love. Something brand-new had happened — something original and fresh and pristine had been revealed — nothing would ever be quite the same again. God made the crucial choice to break the silence of the ages to give himself away in a Word. The most important Word that God has ever spoken took flesh in the womb of a teenage woman, and like all human flesh was born as a fragile bundle of new life.

The mystery of God was somehow concentrated in a child. The length, breadth, depth and height of God's love was somehow expressed in this little one. God was choosing to visit his people — not through dreams and words of the prophets, but in human flesh and bone and sinew. The God who lived in the highest heavens above, chose another address — He decided to pitch his tent among us.

The Christmas story we hear each year is the same, but we are different. Our world is different. Joy and sorrow, laughter and tears, sickness and health, life and death have all wrought changes — for better or for worse in our lives. But no matter what changes we have undergone, what losses we have mourned, what gains we have celebrated, the Christmas story speaks to us again of new birth, and the possibility of our own rebirth. It tells us that things can be different; it gives substance to our hope that life is possible because God was prepared to reduce Himself to the dimensions of a new-born child over 2000 years ago.

In a very real sense, the birth of every child is a small protest against the tired, cynical view that there is nothing new under the sun — that we are condemned to a future which only repeats the stupidities of the past. Moreover, the birth of Jesus is God's heartfelt protest against letting things be, abandoning people to their own devices, leaving people to fall back on the threadbare poverty of their own resources. Jesus is the saving, dynamic help of God among us — he is the one Word on God's telegram of hope.

With the birth of this child a new adventure in faith begins. A new approach to God is opened up for us, a new way of relating to each other is asked of us. It may be an old story, but it is one that is always pregnant with new hope. That is why we make the journey back to Bethlehem each year — to rediscover our own roots in the gift of God, wrapped in swaddling clothes. For us, it is a journey home.

**CHRISTMAS FLOWERS AND DECORATIONS:**

During this Christmas season, we would like to thank all those who have helped us by making memorial offerings. May 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 Thomas Hughes, Dolores Domoraski and the Blazek and Rezabek Families.** If you would like to make a memorial offering, please place it in an envelope marked "Memorial Offering,"

**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. **Please contact Father John [440-473-3560] for more information.**

**PRAYER REQUESTS:**

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

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:

- For an end to the war between Israel and Hamas.
- For an end to the war between Russia and Ukraine.
- For a couple experiencing difficulty in becoming pregnant
- For an end to violence as a means to resolve differences.
- 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.

PRAYERS FOR THE DECEASED:

- For Joseph Mazanetz.
- For Skylar Schrams ['14], cousin of Natalie Kalfas ['12].
- For Mercedes Hronek
- For Hatti Spagnolo, mother of Dennis Spagnolo ['84]
- For Brother Robert Dierker, C.S.C.
- For Cynthia Carter.
- For Mary Jiannetti, great-aunt of AVI associate, Captri.
- For Tim Cooper, brother of Father Jeff Cooper, C.S.C.
- For Thomas McClaughlin, father of Kaley ['17] and former Gilmour Student, Aidan McClaughlin
- For Connor Davis ['14], brother of Kelly ['16] and Brian ['20] Davis
- For Chuck Shade, father of Loren Shade, grandfather of Michael, Madeline, and Charles Shade
- For Josephine Donia, cousin of AVI associate Director, Rob Fleeman.
- For Helene Chambers, mother of Dennis ['72], Thomas ['73], and Rosemary ['86] Chambers, and brother-in-law of Father Thomas Chambers, C.S.C.
- For Earl Stiver

SERVING THE LORD IN THE POOR — JANUARY 20th:

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. **On Saturday morning at 9 AM, they need help setting up items for distribution and preparing for the food pantry to open. It serves around 150 clients each time. 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 us know in the chapel office [440-473-3560] if you would like more information or if you would like to help. This is a wonderful way to serve others. Please consider this opportunity.

MYSTERY:

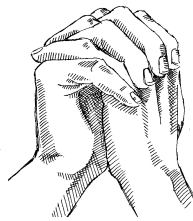
Christianity is the most radical of all world religions because it takes matter seriously as the home of divinity.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

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

PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:

- For Father Larry Jerge, C.S.C., who is under the care of Hospice.
- For Loretta Seidl, sister of Brother Robert Lavelle, C.S.C., who is undergoing medical treatment.
- For John Zippay, family friend of Bernadette and Stephen Ritley, who is critically ill.
- For Sister Mary Ann Lavelle, C.S.J., sister of Brother Robert Lavelle, C.S.C., who is in hospice care.
- For Jill Thompson, who is undergoing treatment for mental health issues.
- For Patty Szaniszlo, Chapel Office Associate, who is recovering from hip replacement surgery.
- For Nora Beach, wife of former Gilmour Religion Instructor, Bob Beach, mother of Hannah [‘98] and Miriam [‘99] Beach, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Jennifer Burger [‘06], sister of Rachel [‘10] and Paul [‘16] Burger, who is undergoing treatment for rare form of breast cancer.
- For Maria Ruiz, mother of Elina Gurney, grandmother of Joseph and Christina Gurney, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Chuck Campanella, father of Anthony Campanella, who continues in rehab following serious surgery.
- 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 Mike Heryak, husband of Janet, father of Lillian [‘09], Rosa [‘12] and Edwin [‘17] Heryak, who is seriously ill.
- For John Roddy, brother of Tim Roddy [‘87], and brother of Gilmour Marketing associate, Mary Roddy Stretar, uncle of Katie Stretar [‘29], and cousin of Daniel [‘83], Mike [‘85], and Matt [‘86] Roddy, who is undergoing treatment for a recurrence of cancer.
- For James Farmer, father of DEI director, JaiCynthia Farmer, who is recovering from a serious heart-related issue.
- For Robert O’Neill, grandfather of Bobby O’Neill [‘33], who is undergoing treatment for bladder cancer.
- For Debbie Marcum, former assistant in the Lower School, who is recovering from a severe heart attack.
- For Josephine Fernando, mother of Melvin [‘83] and Raymond [‘88] Fernando, mother-in-law of Imelda Deogracias Fernando [‘88], who is ill.
- For Lincoln Nye, brother of Maddie Nye [‘25], and former Gilmour student, who is undergoing medical treatment.
- For JoAnne Fisher, wife of Jim, mother of Bill [‘10] and PJ, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Brother Roy Smith, C.S.C., who is recovering from surgery.
- For Brother James Spooner, C.S.C., who is undergoing medical testing.



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.



NEXT BIBLE STUDY — WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 3rd:

Our next Virtual Bible Study will be on Wednesday, January 3rd 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: Epiphany

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 24: 4 th Week in Advent	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream
Sunday, December 24: Christmas Eve	4:00 PM In Person & Live Stream
Monday, December 25: Christmas Day	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream
Tuesday, December 26: St. Stephen	NO MASS
Wednesday, December 27: St. John the Evangelist	NO MASS
Thursday, December 28: Holy Innocents	NO MASS
Friday, December 29:	NO MASS
Saturday, December 30: Feast of the Holy Family	5:00 PM In Person only
Sunday, December 31: Feast of the Holy Family	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream

2024 CALENDARS:

Calendars for the year 2024 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 2022 Calendars to us. Please feel free to take as many calendars as you would like. Thank you.



REFLECTION FOR THE WEEK:

The work of any family is to make their house a home. David feels a bit embarrassed about having his rest in a beautiful palace, while the residence for the Ark of God dwells in a mere tent [2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16]. But God reminds David — through the prophet Nathan — not only God’s fidelity in the past and the future of David’s family line, but also the God will be the one who “will establish a house for you.” God’s home will be within the family line of David — not in some physical structure.

Luke’s Gospel tells of the angel coming into the house of Mary and preparing her to make a home for the secret soon to be shared [Luke 1:26-38]. The presence of God, once carried about in a tent, remains portable, moveable, accompaniable in the tent of the flesh of a human being.

David desires a more honorable place for God’s presence, but he also falls into the most human desire — that is of wanting stability, permanence, and locateability. We all want to have that for ourselves, and also for our God. We want to be able to locate God and go there and find answers. God wants to be with us where we are — where we really live. God wants to locate us and accompany us and prove faithful to us as God was to David.

But, God is not pleased with this idea of David’s, or Nathan’s instruction. God wants David to allow Him to establish a living family that will follow God’s plan, and from whom will come the salvation of the whole world. This is the “house” that God wants. God is not interested in sitting around flexing power muscles as humans think. Rather Divine Compassion is pointing toward a much bigger project — but David and most of his descendants don’t get it.

The house God promises to David is the sacred Body of Jesus — “Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me.” The house of David will become the home for the Word-Made-Flesh. Prophecies and promises lie waiting for their fulfillment. Mary waits, knowing well the tradition of her faith; there will be fullness. Mary is moved and troubled by the visit and the message. She is to play her part in completing the promise and telling the secret.

We are preparing these days to make our houses of stone, brick and wood, homes of welcome, warmth and love. Our God is ever laboring to make a home in us for Jesus. God labors to find room to wedge a way through our personally-arranged fullnesses. The empty womb, the empty stable, the empty world were all available for His taking up residence. God told Nathan that a human house was not big enough; what is big enough is human emptiness, human longing and human openness to the God-prepared completion.

There is a virginal aspect to our human hearts. Nothing has penetrated to the place where only God’s love can make our hearts a home. There is and will always be, an incompleteness within every experience of human love. Perhaps the image of our physical hearts with the little declivity at the top, is a perfect symbol for Advent more than Valentine’s Day.

While making our houses homes these days, we let us examine the empty places of our lives. All the friends and family, all the gifts given and received, all the warmth and welcomes extended, are all both quite real and sacramentally symbolic of how God wants to make places in our flesh for the Word to make “new Nazareths and new Bethlehems.”

—taken from the writings of Eileen Burke-Sullivan and Father Larry Gillick, S.J., which appear on the internet

WHAT IS THIS REALLY ALL ABOUT?

When we speak of Advent or preparing for Christmas, we’re not just talking about waiting for the little baby Jesus to be born. That already happened two thousand years ago. In fact, we’re welcoming the Universal Christ, the Cosmic Christ, the Christ that is forever being born (incarnating) in the human soul and into history.

—Richard Rohr

**CHRISTMAS MAKES SENSE ONLY BECAUSE OF EASTER:**

No matter how much I try to put it out of my mind, I frequently think of “White Christmas” — not because I’m sentimental about old-time Christmas songs, but because I teach Scripture. Few noticed the song when Bing Crosby first sang it on his Christmas radio show in 1941 — nor when it was put into the 1942 movie *Holiday Inn*. According to music historians, it only took off because so many soldiers were away from home at Christmas during World War II. As the war went on, its popularity continued to grow. Twelve years later a movie was made named *White Christmas*, and by now, it’s the number one best-selling song of all time. We only go back to its origins today because of its later history. Its eventual importance transformed the way we look at its beginning.

In many ways, the same thing happened to Jesus of Nazareth. We wouldn’t be celebrating Christmas today if he hadn’t eventually risen from the dead. Though we don’t have as many days off from school for Easter as we do for Christmas, there’s no way Christmas is as important for Christians as Easter. Jesus’ birth wasn’t even celebrated in the church for the first several centuries. On the other hand, Easter was commemorated the first year after the initial event. December 25th was chosen as the date of Jesus’ birth, not because it’s the actual date of his birth, but because of the later Roman pagan practices the church was trying to replace at the time. I won’t even get into the non-Christian origins of Christmas trees, lights, exchanging gifts and mistletoe. About the only specifically Christian tradition we have is Francis of Assisi’s Christmas crib — and it took almost 1,200 years for that to come into existence.

The problem is that Christmas without Jesus’ dying and rising isn’t a Christian feast; we’re forgetting what happened in order to make Jesus’ birth exceptional. Many of us can sympathize with a baby born in difficult circumstances, but never look at that baby as more than a baby, rarely noticing how his eventual dying and rising demands we also imitate his death and resurrection.

We can certainly echo Isaiah’s proclamation that the feet of one who brings glad tidings are beautiful [Isaiah 52:2-10], but if we’re followers of Jesus of Nazareth, our initial faith proclamation has nothing to do with Christmas, but with Easter. Our ancestors in the faith became conscious of his death and resurrection long before they even thought about his birth. His dying and rising are the glad tidings they handed down to us.

In his famous book, *The Birth of the Messiah*, the late Raymond Brown is careful to explain Jesus’ “messianic moment”— the point at which Jesus actually became God. Most modern Christians follow the theology John puts forth in his gospel [1:1-18]. Jesus is God from all eternity. The Word exists “from the beginning.” Our only question revolves around when that divine person became “flesh and made his dwelling among us.”

But, as Brown points out, a belief in Jesus’ preexistence as God only develops toward the end of the first century. Before then, beginning with Paul, many felt that Jesus became God when his Father raised him from the dead [see Romans 1]. The birth of Jesus is a lot more complicated than just staging a grade school Christmas play. As the author of Hebrews states, God has spoken to us through “partial and various ways.” Perhaps even through a process similar to how Irving Berlin’s “White Christmas” became the all-time best seller.

—taken from the writings of Father Roger Karban, 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].



taught that a census of her own was sacrilegious because it demonstrated that the king would rely on his brute power — armies and taxes — rather than God's providence.

In Luke's infancy narrative — which includes the Annunciation and Visitation, the journey to Bethlehem and lack of room at the inn — is the story version of the poetic prologue of John's Gospel, which speaks of the eternal Word becoming flesh and being rejected by his own [John 1:1-16].

It seems that every epoch, every century of human history, must lament its share of what Isaiah described as boots that trample in battle and cloaks soaked with blood. But those are not nice to think about. At this time of year, we would prefer that TV show us less of the wars and more of Macy's Parade. Nevertheless, we'll miss the evangelical message of Christmas if we allow ourselves to sleep in heavenly peace, satiated by Hallmark.

Jesus was born in desperate circumstances. His parents, like the 100 million people forced to be on the move today, had no insurance policies, no AAA roadside help and no credit cards to buy their way in somewhere. With no insulation from ever-present difficulties and danger, they were dependent, hopeful for the kindness of strangers. In this, Mary and Joseph were icons of God and the child they were about to receive into the world. The Creator did not exercise power and might, but set the universe on a course of evolution in which divine love would one day take on flesh and need to rely on the goodwill of people with generous, open hearts.

We must remember that God did not do this to shame the comfortable, but to bring joy to the needy. In Luke's version of the story, neither religious leaders nor the wealthy represented by the Magi noticed the signs of their times.

Who did notice? The shepherds, people of shady reputation, unwashed and unable to observe religious laws — they took the angels' message to heart. These were the ones who, in spite of their fear, left their 99 [see Matthew 18:12] — more or less — and hastened to Bethlehem to see “what the Lord has made known to us.” Then the shepherds became the first evangelists, “glorifying God and making known the message.”

For Christians, the Incarnation is the high point of creation. All of the universe exists from God; God is present somehow in everything as a result of divine love. Now we can understand the Incarnation as the essence, the most concrete expression of the revelation of divine love and our clearest image of what God is like. And with this, the story gets more challenging. When angels appeared to shepherds, they said: “You will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes.” This very ordinary scene turns out to be a scandalous theophany — God's greatest self-revelation is of divinity in diapers. Traditional Byzantine icons of the Nativity depict this by showing the swaddled infant in a manger that could also represent a coffin, his wrapping cloths like those used in burial. In the words of Sister Elizabeth Johnson: “The Incarnation enacts the kind of divine love that enters empathetically into human experience, self-identifying with the glory and agony of human life from within, befriending even the godless and the godforsaken.”

The evangelical message of Christmas is just that. God longs to be with us, God loves us profoundly and respectfully enough to share our mortal life. From such love, God has become vulnerable to us, never imposing but inviting us into a union possible only when God enters into human life.

The babe wrapped in swaddling clothes is a sign that God exercises power as faithful, loving committed accompaniment in vulnerability. And all of this, to invite us to become like the God who dwells among us, seeking to find a home in us.

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



EMBRACE YOUR OWN LIFE:

Besides affirming life and remembering it, celebration is filled with expectations for the future. If the past has the last word, a person would imprison himself/herself more and more the older they become. If the present were the ultimate moment of satisfaction, we would cling to it with hedonistic eagerness, trying to squeeze the last drop of life out of it. But the present holds promises and reaches out to the horizons of life — and this makes it possible for us to embrace our future as well as our past in the moment of celebration.

So celebrating means the affirmation of the present, which becomes fully possible only by remembering the past and expecting more to come in the future. But celebrating in this sense very seldom takes place. Nothing is as difficult as really accepting one's own life. More often than not, the present is denied, the past becomes a source of complaints, and the future is looked upon as a reason for despair or apathy.

When Jesus came to redeem humankind, he came to free us from the boundaries of time. Through him, it became clear not only that God is with us where our presence is in time and space, but also that our past does not have to be denied but can be remembered and forgiven, and that we are still waiting for him to come back and reveal to us what remains unseen.

—Henri Nouwen

HOW TO MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY TO GOD:

A few weeks ago, I attended a White House Conference in Washington, D.C. on the relationship of the faith community to race relations in the United States. But because of that meeting, I began to realize what Christmas is really all about. We were black, white, and brown, Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Bahai, and Native Americans called together to discuss the relationship of religion to race. Ironically enough, it was the Indian chief who taught me the meaning of Isaiah.

Into the midst of the theological meanderings of those of us who wanted to write another paper, have another meeting, take another workshop to combat racism, the Chief brought the message of Isaiah again [Isaiah 40:3]. He stood up slowly, folded his hands quietly in front of him, looked out over our heads and said softly: “I have spent my life teaching our children to say ‘thank you’ — thank you for the grass; thank you for the rain; thank you for the stranger; thank you for all the people of the world. I think that if we learn to say ‘thank you’ for everything, we will come to realize its value, to respect it, and to see it as sacred.”

It was a simple speech, but it had a kind of cataclysmic effect on my soul. It gave me pause. It made me think. It raised the specter of Isaiah in me all over again. It made me think newly about what the scriptures are really talking about when they tell us to “make straight the way of God.” I suddenly realized that Christmas is time to shout, “thank you.”

Christmas is the commitment to life made incarnate. It is the call to see God everywhere — and especially in those places we would not expect to find glory and grace. It is the call to exult in life. Christmas is the obligation to see that everything leads us directly to God — to realize that there is no one, nothing on earth that is not the way to God for me. I knew instantly that the moment we begin to really celebrate Christmas — to look at everyone and everything as a revelation of God, to say “thank you” for them — that racism would be over, war would be no more, world hunger would disappear, everything would be gift, everyone would be sacred.

Indeed, it is simple, but oh so clear — all we have to do to “make straight the way of God” is to say “thank you,” to learn to live intensely, to have a zeal for life, to develop a passion for life.

—taken from the writings of Sister Joan Chittister, O.S.B., which appear on the internet



GOD'S PLAN FOR CHRISTMAS:

Christmas is one of the most loved feast days in the Church. Even in our ever more secular society, it is a feast still celebrated by most of the population. People — whether of other faiths or of none — find themselves able to find meaning in it. Perhaps the reason for this is because it is a feast which is associated so much with peace, or maybe because the exchange of gifts within the family provides an opportunity to demonstrate our love for each other, or it could be because the focus is on a new born baby and this stirs our hearts with thoughts of innocence, or possibly it is simply because people everywhere like nice decorations and cheerful music at a cold time of the year.

Of course, we Christians can go along with all of these sentiments, but we know that we also celebrate something much more — celebrating the birth of our Divine Savior. For we know that we are sunk in sin. We know that as human beings we are essentially selfish and overly concerned with ourselves and our own comforts — often at the expense of other people. We Christians know that people always prefer to do what they want and not what God wants.

Realizing our fallen nature, we Christians know that what the world needs more than anything is a Savior. We know that humankind needs to be redeemed from its sins and brought back into harmony and right relationship with God.

And we also know that right from the beginning God has his own plan to achieve just this. While most people do not believe any of this, it has been revealed to us that this is how things actually are — God has a plan for us. And this plan involves sending us his Son to show us how to live our lives in harmony with God's wishes, and to give his life as a sacrifice for our sins so that the royal road to heaven can be opened up for all of us.

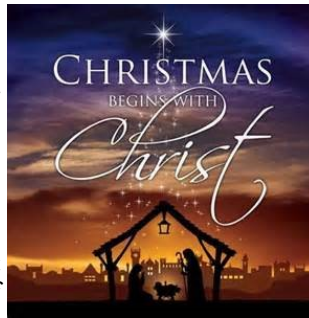
Jesus is at the heart of this plan; his birth we celebrate. And God's plan continues to unfold. We might worry about time; we are always thinking about days and dates and when things happen. But God doesn't worry about these things. We are on God's time — and God's plan of salvation continues to unfold.

God first revealed himself to Abraham about four thousand years ago. During the following two thousand years, all sorts of things happened to Abraham's descendants — among many other things they were taken into slavery in Egypt, and then journeyed through the Sinai desert for forty years before entering the Promised Land. Later on, they were taken into captivity once again — this time to Babylon; and they were only able to return to Israel seventy years later.

During all this time God sent Prophets to his people to inform them of his will, and to inspire them to remain faithful and grow in spiritual insight. Unfortunately, the message of the Prophets was largely rejected and lost, and the Temple Priesthood became corrupted. But eventually God decided that the time was ripe; he sent us a Savior — his Son Jesus.

Jesus came into our world as an infant — like any other baby child he was innocent and vulnerable and utterly dependent on Mary and Joseph for sustenance and protection. Almost immediately his life was in danger, necessitating the Flight into Egypt. But eventually the family returned to their home in Nazareth, and he grew into maturity there until the time came for him to begin his ministry of teaching and healing.

One thing that many Christians like to do during this time is to put up a Nativity scene. It is a simple scene with a mother and father with their new born child surrounded by the animals and the dumbstruck shepherds. Angels hover over the roof to remind us that what we see is no domestic scene, but rather heaven breaking through into our world. When we look at the manger scene, we realize that what we are seeing is something that can only be called the hinge point of history — the moment when heaven and earth were joined and the Son of God entered our world. It is a moment of utmost simplicity, indeed of



For those of us who have already welcomed this child into our hearts and made him the center of our lives, we should rejoice! We have come to know the meaning and purpose of our lives. We know the truth and are given the power to live in the love of God. It is now up to us not only to celebrate it, but to share it with everyone we meet. This light cannot remain hidden. We must bring it into our homes, into our places of work, and into our classrooms.

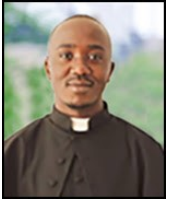
For those of us who are still searching, God is offering us another opportunity to welcome him into our lives. God never grows tired of stretching his hand out to us when we are lost or confused. Whatever it is that we are struggling with — whatever it is that is keeping us from experiencing the fullness of joy — God has the answer for it. We need only turn to the baby born this day, take him into our arms and promise to love him. When the first step of our searching becomes love rather than doubt, then we are back on the path to truth. When love rather than knowledge is our driving force, then everything suddenly becomes a little clearer.

God wants to move in with us. He wants to be in our lives. Like any baby, he simply wants our love and attention. Who would deny a baby affection and care? Who wouldn't want to share their homes and their lives with a newborn child? A Child is born for us today — He is Jesus!

—taken from the writings of Douglas Sousa, which appear on the internet.

SUBMITTING TO THE WILL OF GOD:

"It was the will of God," a senior catechist remarks after a court case in which he sought justice for his deceased family members was dismissed. The 2007-2008 Kenyan post-election violence left him a widower and homeless. For years, he had struggled seeing the people who destroyed his property and killed his wife roam freely in the environs of Timboroa, Eldoret, in Western Kenya. He now totally submits to God the greatest sorrow of his life with strong words of faith as he seeks to forgive. He remains steadfast in his ministry as a catechist, serving and living with the same people who caused him this extreme pain.



It is through such human experiences that Luke's Gospel [speaks to us eloquently [Luke 1:26-38]. In the Gospel, Mary totally submits to the plan of God by saying: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done according to your word." With those words of faith, the incarnation of the Son of God becomes a reality. The Word becomes flesh and dwells among us. She avails herself for God's plan of salvation to reach its ultimate stage.

Today we are asked to join our "yes" with that of Mary. We avail ourselves to God in total obedience and availability to conceive and bear Christ in all aspects of our lives of service. We become "people with to bring" — our Holy Cross vision statement — and through us the mission of making Christ known, loved, and served is a reality.

As the Advent Season comes to its culmination, let us ponder on the will of God in our lives and accept it according to His plan, trusting we are God's servants with complete faith in Him.

—Deacon Alinaitwe Douglas Godfrey, C.S.C.

THE GOD WHO DWELLS AMONG US:

Seeing Santa at every corner and checkout counter, Christmas trees adorning every public place, lights blinking and *Joy to the World* blaring from all directions, we tend to forget the historical contexts of the Scriptures that situate the prophecies and birth stories of the Savior. Isaiah aptly portrayed his own and Jesus' times by describing people walking in darkness and dwelling in a land of gloom, people who suffered under the rod of an overseer — treated like yoked oxen, valued for their labor and taxes, people whose personhood had ceased to matter [Isaiah 9:2-7].

There was little of prosperity or joy stirring while Mary and Joseph trudged along for the 90 miles that separated Nazareth from Bethlehem [Luke 2:1-14]. The census that put them on the road — whether historically verifiable or not — symbolized the people's subjugation to a pagan empire. Israel had been

PLEASED AS MAN WITH MEN TO DWELL:

God created the world out of nothing through the power of his Word. He spoke, and it came to be. He said: “Let there be light,” and there was light. He caused the mountains to rise up from the sea. He filled the sea with fish and the land with animals. Finally, by the power of his Word, he created man and woman to be the crowning achievement of his great work [see Genesis 1]. God created in us hearts to hear his word and mouths to proclaim it.

When God called Israel out from among the nations to be a people peculiarly his own, he sent them prophets to proclaim his word among them. Such was the prophet Isaiah. He proclaimed to the people of Israel the good news of peace and salvation from God. Through the prophets, God promised Israel a mighty savior who would forgive them their sins and lead them in the ways of peace. Not only would this great Messiah lead Israel to freedom, but all the nations would witness the great power of God at work through this Savior [Isaiah 52:7-10].

When Isaiah first spoke these words, it was unclear what his meaning was. Who would this great king be? How would he lead Israel to freedom and peace? Today, we know exactly what Isaiah meant — the boy born on Christmas Day to Mary and Joseph fulfills all the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament. Jesus is the Savior of the world.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews wrote this: “In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he has spoken to us through the Son” [Hebrews 1:1-6]. God, who so powerfully created the world by his Word and then called the nation of Israel into being by his Word, now speaks one last time in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the Word of God. Jesus is the Word made flesh dwelling among us.

What does the birth of Jesus tell us about this mighty God? Very simply — God wants us to know him. He sent Jesus — a man like us — so that we could hear from his very mouth how much he loves us, and how he longs for our friendship. Jesus is truth and love. Whoever hears him, hears the Father. Whoever sees him, sees the Father. We do not need to look anywhere else to find God — but in the person of Jesus.

When St. John Paul II made his first trip to the United States, he preached a beautiful homily to the rain-soaked crowds who had gathered in the Boston Common. Turning his attention to the young people present, he noted how honestly they seek authentic goodness and truth. In response, he said: “The message of love that Christ brought is always important, always relevant. It is not difficult to see how today’s world — despite its beauty and grandeur, despite the conquests of science and technology, despite the refined and abundant material goods that it offers — is yearning for more truth, for more love, for more joy. And all of this is found in Christ and in his way of life”.

Therefore, all those who want to know the truth should turn to Jesus. He is the truth. All those who seek meaning in their lives should turn to Jesus. He is the source of all meaning. All those who seek love should turn to Jesus. He is the love of God made flesh among us. These words of the pope make clear to us the meaning of Christmas — Jesus is born to bring God into our world and into our lives.

And so, this child born is a lifeline to those who are lost and don’t know how to find their way. This child is God’s hand stretched out to all those who looked for success, happiness, and fulfillment in what the world offers, but couldn’t find it. Jesus is God’s peace extended to all those who have become bitter or enraged by life’s unfairness. This child is hope born to those who have grown weary and have given up on ever finding meaning and purpose in their lives.

Whatever it is our hearts ache for — whether it be love, peace, truth, or meaning — all of it can be found in the person of Jesus.

For many people, his year has been difficult — the death of a loved one, the strain of family life or friendship, or sickness. The future can look dark. However, in the darkness of these days, hope is born for us. If Jesus is our light, we can never lose our way, and the darkness of despair can never totally consume us — Jesus is the Light of the world.

poverty, but at the same time it is a moment of great glory and wonder.

God could have sent his Son into our world in any number of different ways. He could have arrived with fanfare and trumpet surrounded by armies of angels — which is the sort of arrival that the religious authorities of Jesus’ time expected. But our God is a wise God, and he sends his Son into our world to be born in a stable of a young virgin, and to grow up in a poor village in an obscure backwater of the Roman Empire.

His arrival goes unnoticed except for a few shepherds; Wise Men from the East will arrive sometime later to pay Jesus homage — but no one pays them much attention. This is all very deliberate because it demonstrates from the beginning just what kind of Messiah this is.

We call Jesus king, but he is as unlike any earthly king. He is someone who spends his time with the poor, he heals the sick, he feeds the hungry, he gives sight to the blind, he cures lepers, he raises the dead, and he preaches a Gospel of love. But most of all, he forgives sins. For this is why he came — to forgive the sins of all humankind and to open up for us the way of salvation. And he invites each one of us to repent, to experience his forgiveness, and to join him on the royal road that leads to heaven.

This is what we are celebrating on Christmas — the most unique and significant birth that there ever happened. It is the beginning of our salvation — the event that changed the world. The only feast that eclipses Christmas is Easter when we mark the resurrection and the arrival of our salvation.

So, on this holy day we celebrate, we pray, we sing, we feast, we rejoice. But above all we thank God that he sent us his Son to be our Savior. Merry Christmas.

—taken from the writings of Father Alex McAllister, S.D.S., which appear on the internet

NEW IN CHRIST:

What is perhaps most striking about the visions of the world’s future is that they have taken form completely independent of Christian thinking which is preeminently future-oriented. Those enormous powers which are gaining control in the hardened world, which cry out for a new age, a new world, and a new order can find no solid roots in Christianity, it seems. While Christians were so busy with their interior household problems and were so preoccupied with themselves that they lost sight of the rest of the world, a growing need outside of Christianity became more and more evident. This suggestion Christians often regarded as merely naïve, anarchical and immature.

And yet you are Christian only so long as you look forward to a new world, so long as you constantly pose critical questions to the society you live in, so long as you emphasize the need of conversion both for yourself and for the world, so long as you stay unsatisfied with the status quo and keep saying that a new world is yet to come. You are a Christian only when you believe that you have a role to play in the realization of this new kingdom, and when you urge everyone you meet with a holy unrest to make haste so that the promise might soon be fulfilled. So long as you live as a Christian you keep looking for a new order, a new structure, a new life.

—taken from the writings of Father Thomas Keating, which appear on the internet

FAITH EDUCATION:

Our Faith Education classes have begun. Our Faith Education classes meet on **Sundays from 8:45—9:45 AM**. Please join us as we come together to begin our faith journey for this year by entering into prayer and worship together. If you have any questions, please contact Patty in the Chapel Office [[440-473-3560]. **Upcoming class dates: January 7-21-28**. Thank you for taking care of this important responsibility.

**LIVING THE MOMENT:**

The only way we can make the most of our lives is to make the most of our moments.

—Cleo Wade



A RESPONSE TO CHANGE HISTORY:

And Mary said: “Let it be done to me according to your Word” [Luke 1:38]. The history of the world turned on that line. All that God planned to do to save us, the gift that divine love wanted to give us hung on Mary’s response, on her willingness to cooperate.

Her choice was a free choice, for Mary could have said “no”. It would have been easy to find many reasons to say “no.” She could have responded to Gabriel by saying: “Wow! This is unexpected. Sort of out of the blue. How long before you need my answer? I’d really like to think about this. I know that God has a plan, but I’m rather upset about being brought into it at the very last minute. You might want to suggest that if God expects human cooperation, it might be good to give a little lead time, a few months so you could think things over. I’m sure that God would get a much better response using that approach. And really, to tell you the truth, it’s not the best time for me. I’m really busy with the wedding and all coming up. We still have to pick a hall and get flowers; I’ve already bought the dress and it’s not going to fit if I’m pregnant. And the more I think about it, this idea of conceiving by the Holy Spirit without a human father, it’s kind of peculiar, isn’t it? I really wish God would rethink that part of the plan. Joseph is a great guy, but I don’t think he’ll sign off on that. So why don’t we just leave it this way: first of all, tell God that I’m very honored to be considered. But the plan is nebulous and really not that well thought out. So why don’t you take it back and work on it a bit? Put some more detail in it, iron out some of the wrinkles, and we’ll talk again after the wedding.”

Mary could have said “no”, but she didn’t. What she said was: “Let it be done to me according to your Word.” Without much preparation, with very few details, and with a lot of things that were unsettling at best, Mary said “yes” to God. She said “yes” because she trusted that God had a plan and would not abandon her. Because she said “yes”, we have Jesus; we have eternal life; and we are preparing to celebrate Christmas.

Mary is our model — our model always, but especially our model in the next few days. I am quite certain that in the next few days, in the midst of holiday preparation, God will be asking us to do some things. God will be asking us for our cooperation. Like Mary, God’s request is very likely to come out of the blue, without much preparation. Like Mary, the call might be unexpected, or even unwanted. It certainly will come at a very busy time. But unlike Mary, we should not expect an angel to announce it to us. Therefore, we need to be watching, watching for the opportunities that God provides, waiting for our chance to say either “yes” or “no”.

That chance might come with a sudden twist in our plans — something unexpected that looks like an intrusion — something our children need or our parents expect. When that intrusion comes, we can either complain and feel sorry for ourselves, or we can see it as an invitation from God to be flexible and loving. We can choose to say: “Let it be done to me according to your Word.” It might come because we have a sadness to bear in this holiday season — a sadness because someone we love is not with us, a sadness because there are tensions in our family. When that sadness emerges, we can either hold it in and let it cause anger and depression in our hearts, or we can accept the truth that there is a sadness that we cannot change and reach out to others in love and in hope. We can say: “Let it be done to me according to your Word.”

It might happen as we gather together with family and friends. Suddenly we could be faced with an opportunity to affirm somebody we love, to forgive someone who has hurt us, to listen to someone who is in need. When that opportunity presents itself, we can either choose to forge ahead with all of the other things that we have to do, or we can stop and accept the invitation to do God’s will. We can choose to say: “Let it be done to me according to your Word.”

Mary is our model — the model of how God chooses to interact with us. What God does is invite

God’s love will usher them an eternal Christmas.

What a wonderful time we are living in. It is not just Christmas time; we are living in the time of the Word of God. His Presence is within us. His Presence is around us. His presence is real. He is Real!

The Word of God whispered into Mary’s ear, and she conceived. The Word of God is shouting into our ears, and we are transforming the world with His Presence. Hail Mary, Full of Grace. Because you let God work within you, we have become the Masterpiece of His Hand.

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

ATTENDANCE:

If you attend Mass regularly here at Our Lady Chapel, it would be helpful if you filled out a form [name, address, phone number, children, etc.] indicating this fact, if you have not already done so. Such information not only helps us to know who is attending Our Lady Chapel; it also is of great assistance to us in record keeping [for our friend, the IRS] of any contributions which you may make.

ENVELOPES:

- When you need a **new supply** of envelopes, please feel free to take a supply of them from the table in the vestibule, or call Father John at the Campus Ministry Office [473-3560].
- When you **use** your envelope, please make sure that **your number** is on it. If you need to know your number, please call the Campus Ministry Office. Thanks.

GETTING CHRISTMAS RIGHT:

It is no use saying that we are born two thousand years too late to give room to Christ. Nor will those who live at the end of the world have been born too late. Christ is always with us, always asking for room in our hearts. But now it is with the voice of our contemporaries that He speaks; with the eyes of store clerks, factory workers, and children that he gazes; with the hands of office workers, slum dwellers, and suburban housewives that He gives. It is with the feet of soldiers and tramps that He walks, and with the heart of anyone in need that He longs for shelter. And giving shelter or food to anyone who asks for it, or needs it, is giving it to Christ.

It would be foolish to pretend that it is always easy to remember this. If everyone were holy and handsome, with “alter Christus” — “other Christ” — shining in neon lighting from them, it would be easy to see Christ in everyone. If Mary had appeared in Bethlehem clothed, as St. John says, with the sun, a crown of twelve stars on her head, and the moon under her feet [see Revelation 12:1], then people would have fought to make room for her. But that was not God’s way for her, nor is it Christ’s way for Himself.

In Christ’s human life, there were always a few who made up for the neglect of the crowd. The shepherds did it; their hurrying to the crib atoned for the people who would flee from Christ. The wise men did it; their journey across the world made up for those who refused to stir one hand’s breadth from the routine of their lives to go to Christ. Even the gifts the wise men brought have in themselves an obscure recompense and atonement for what would follow later in this Child’s life. For they brought gold, the king’s emblem, to make up for the crown of thorns that He would wear; they offered incense, the symbol of praise, to make up for the mockery and the spitting; they gave Him myrrh, to heal and soothe, and He was wounded from head to foot.

We can do it too, exactly as they did. We are not born too late. We do it by seeing Christ and serving Christ in friends and strangers, in everyone we come in contact with. For a total Christian, the goad of duty is not needed to perform this or that good deed. It is not a duty to help Christ — it is a privilege.

—Dorothy Day



THE WORD IN MARY'S EAR AND OURS:

I love art — all forms of art. I love music, opera, and ballet. I love sculpture and architecture. I particularly love painting. My favorite place in the world that is not a church is the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. It is not that I don't like the other famous art museums — like the Louvre in Paris, the Uffizi in Florence, the Prado in Madrid, and, of course, the Vatican Museums. But I first fell in love with art at the Met.

A few years ago, I was roaming the Met with an audio guide stuck in my ear. I came upon a medieval painting of the scene depicted in Luke's Gospel — the scene we usually call the Annunciation [Luke 1:26-38]. There must be at least fifty paintings of the Annunciation in the Met — all masterpieces. I do not know why, but I decided to punch in the numbers and listen to the commentary on this particular work of art. The narrator pointed out the various different technical elements of the painting, and then spoke about the dove over Mary and the Angel's head. The dove represented, of course, the Holy Spirit. Rays of light emanated from the dove and seemed to be entering into one of Mary's ears. In this painting, the narrator went on, the artist depicted the quaint theory that since Mary was a virgin and remained a virgin, the conception of Jesus took place through her ears leaving the rest of her body virginal. The narrator missed the artist's point. The artist's point was that Mary heard the Word of God. That was why the Holy Spirit was able to overshadow her. That was how the Word of God became flesh through her.

Mary was given a choice. The world waited for her answer. She could have refused to allow God's plan to work through her. She could have agreed grudgingly to the plan — like Zechariah, John the Baptist's father did when the Angel Gabriel spoke to him in the Temple — or Mary could have rejected God's plan. But Mary was open to the Word of God. She allowed the Word to enter her and transform her from a simple maiden to the mother of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, to the Queen of the Universe. She was open to the Word of God, and the Word of God used her to transform the world. The "what" of Jesus — what is he — is human and divine, two natures. But the "who" of Jesus — who is he — is always the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Mary said "Yes!" to the Word in her ear and became the Mother of God.



That same Word of God whispers into our ears, yours and mine. God calls us to continue the transformation of the world. He calls us to make the Savior real to those who long for his presence. Will we reject the Word and force Him to look for another ear? Will we obey grudgingly and limit His action through us? Or will we make a decision for the Lord, and offer ourselves totally to God?

We come to the Eucharist because we have chosen Jesus Christ. We recognize our humanity — our weakness — and we seek strength to remain faithful to this choice. Mary's great virtue was her obedience. Opposite Eve, Mary is the New Eve that brought new life — Divine Life — to the world.

The Word of God calls us to nurture the presence of Christ within us. We are not pregnant like Mary became, but we still have the Living Jesus within us. Like an expectant mother, all of us care for this new and wonderful presence. We eat the food we need — the Eucharist — to allow this Presence to grow.

The Word of God whispers into our ears and calls upon us to bring this Divine Presence within us to others. We do this by standing up for our faith. We do this by searching out for those who need His Strength. So many people hurt at Christmas time. People who have lost loved ones need special attention. People who are wandering the world listlessly, from thing to thing, need special care. People who are sick and elderly and wondering if this will be their last Christmas, need the assurance that

our cooperation and then wait for our response. Do not expect to see the angel Gabriel, but watch for the opportunities. They will be there. When you see them, be like Mary. Say "yes." Say "yes" to God's request, "yes" to God's will. Do your part in bringing Jesus into our world.

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

CHRISTMAS — A CELEBRATION OF WHO WE ARE:

In many ways, Paul's letter to the Church at Rome can be seen as a commentary on the mystery of the Incarnation celebrated on Christmas [Romans 16:25-27]. From the very beginning, our God had a secret plan to save the whole human family. Israel kept alive the divine promise of salvation — especially through its great prophets, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. In the fullness of time, God sent his son into the world to establish the kingdom of justice and peace. As son of God and son of Mary — Jesus, born in a stable and baptized by John — went about doing good, which aroused the fear and anger of the authorities who had him crucified. Obedient unto death, Christ was raised by his Father to a glorious life, becoming life-giving spirit for all and making the divine plan of salvation definitive and irrevocable. We Christians are called to live our lives in Jesus Christ by committing ourselves to him and participating in his mission. In effect, we need to celebrate Christmas as a beautiful expression of our core Christian belief that Jesus fulfilled the divine promise of salvation for all.

We can imagine how a family attending Christmas Mass could be enlightened by Paul's instructions. The grandmother who thinks only Catholics are saved could realize that her Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim friends are also included in God's salvation plan. The father who attends Mass only on Christmas and Easter could decide to come more often, since he senses that it would help him better manage his stressful life. The mother who concentrates on keeping the commandments could realize that her faith is more about generously following Christ than keeping rules. The teenage son who is struggling with feelings of inferiority, could find some confidence in knowing that God loves him enough to send his Son into a troubled world. The grade school daughter who loves getting Christmas presents could remember it is Christ's birthday.

How can you get more out of the Christmas liturgy?

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

READINGS FOR THE WEEK:

Monday: 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 52:2-10, Hebrews 1:1-6, John 1:1-18

Tuesday: Acts 6:8-7:59, Matthew 10:17-22

Wednesday: 1 John 1:1-4, John 20:1-8

Thursday: 1 John 1:5-2:2, Matthew 2:13-18

Friday: 1 John 2:3-11, Luke 2:22-35

Saturday: 1 John 2:12-17, Luke 2:36-40

Feast of the Holy Family: Sirach 3:2-14, Colossians 3:12-21, Luke 2:22-40

ROOM IN THE INN — TURNING CHRIST AWAY:

I love praying with the Psalms. There's such a beautiful, poetic element to the language of this book of the Bible. There is authenticity — human doubt, suffering, or fear — as well as reminders of God's faithfulness. One thing I've noticed, in particular, is the common thread in this Old Testament perspective — anticipation of the Messiah, the Chosen One.

We, of course, now know this Messiah to be Jesus Christ, but ancient Jews could only hope and eagerly wait for the Messiah to be revealed. They had waited a while, too. If you look at ancient Israelites' history with God, there were plenty of ups and downs — times of trust and times of wandering. At times, it seemed like God had forgotten His promises to His people altogether.

A verse in Psalm 77 says: "This is what causes my grief — that the way of the Most High has changed" [77:10]. You can almost sense the Jews' frustrations, fearing that God had abandoned them, that the promised Chosen One was never coming to save them. But through that all, God was faithful. His ways had never changed; rather, it was their hearts that had changed in their reception of His love and trust in His Word.

So what does that mean for their understanding of the Messiah? The Israelites were God's chosen people. But despite this identity, they were oppressed, conquered, scattered. They were hoping eagerly for a restoration of their Kingdom — for the world to finally see that they were God's holy nation. But the Kingdom they anticipated was a worldly one — not a heavenly Kingdom. They understood God's faithfulness to mean a restoration to earthly glory. They expected a might ruler, a powerful King who would seize back the authority owed to them. So when God finally did come knocking on their door as a tiny babe in a manger, they were more than a little surprised.

Jesus' arrival was unexpected. The King of the Universe became a fragile, weak infant. He didn't arrive in glory. He didn't ascend to power — at least not in the way we might expect it. His merits and glory were hidden — invisible to one looking only with worldly eyes. His throne was a cross, and His crown was made of thorns. This was not a part of the plan — at least in the eyes of those who hoped for a worldly deliverer.

The Jews prayed for deliverance, but they expected more than Jesus, son of Joseph. They couldn't believe God's Messiah would be so — disappointing.

How often do we feel this way? We pray for God to intervene. But then we fail to recognize — or accept — what He sends our way. Perhaps we pray for a good grade, or a successful career, or for things to go our way. And when we are met by tribulation, we doubt, just as the Israelites did. It's human of us to expect God's will to look pretty, to believe that doing well is equal to being loved by God. But when the test doesn't go so well, or we don't get the job, then what? Do we accept it as part of God's plan? Or do we think He checked out, or that God failed to deliver?

Lack of trust in His faithfulness is only one way we turn Christ away. However, there's an elephant in the room — there's a way in which we continually tell God there is no room for Him in the room of our hearts. It's the Holy Eucharist.

Think about it. Just as Christ humbled Himself as a baby, so, too, does He humble Himself in the Eucharist, coming to us in the appearance of bread and wine. And just like the ancient Israelites who turned Him away, many times we accept His gift without reverence. We say "Amen," and continue on our way. Maybe we expect more — maybe we expect the Eucharist to "taste like God," or something. Maybe we're disappointed. This is God? This is the King of the Universe? That's it?

The Holy Eucharist is unassuming. But that doesn't make it any less glorious — it is God, the King of the Universe that we receive. It is Christ — the Word Made Flesh — that we gaze upon. The Eucharist is unassuming, but so is our Lord.



Our soul as a home of sorts. In this Advent season, the metaphor is even more fitting. When Jesus knocks — which He always does — do we close the door? Do we call out: "Sorry, I'm busy!" or, "There's no room for you here.?" Is our floor cluttered and messy? Are we prepared to let Him in, or do we send Him away, onto the next home?

Alternatively, we could rush to the door. We could open it at once, excited that He has chosen to make our home — our soul — His dwelling. After all, we had been expecting a guest, hadn't we? Is our home clean — at least clean enough for us to find Him a seat? Do we usher Him in, look Him in the eyes, and say: "I'm glad you're here. I've been expecting you!"?

When we say "Amen," do we actually mean it? Do we actually believe Christ is who He says He is? Do we actually believe the Messiah has come? Or do we secure Him to the Cross once again with our doubt and disbelief?

If we want to open the door of our hearts to the Lord, we should take note of how He was received in the Gospels. Do we want to chase Him out of the temple? Or do we want to run to Him, bearing gifts to honor His arrival?

Trust in God — rain or shine, A+ or F, sickness or health. Know that He will never abandon you — even if your life doesn't go exactly as you had planned. God is faithful; He will not change. He will not disappoint. He has promised us a promise that will not be shaken, that will never be revoked — "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son" [John 3:16]. For YOU.

Heaven is touching earth every day — like an unforeseen kiss, I might add — in our daily circumstances, in our relationships, and in the very life of Jesus Christ upon the altar in the Eucharist.

The Messiah is here. Will you accept Him? —taken from the writings of Faith Noah, a college student.

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 Chapel. 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].**

**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.

**HOPE:**

When we live with hope, we do not get tangled up with concerns for how our wishes will be fulfilled. So, too, our prayers are not directed toward the gift, but toward the One who gives it. Ultimately, it is not a question of having a wish come true but of expressing an unlimited faith in the giver of all good things. Hope is based on the premise that the other gives only what is good. Hope includes an openness by which you wait for the promise to come through, even though you never know when, where, or how this might happen.

—Henri Nouwen