

ADVENT 2018



THE ASCENT

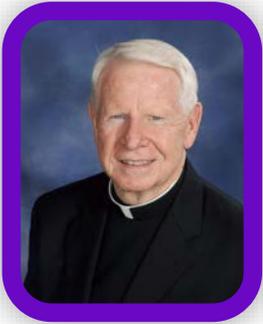
A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION





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Dear Fellow Parishioners,

November 2018

Once again this Fall we are reminded of the many reasons to be thankful for the blessings that we experience daily in our lives. It is so easy for us to think of the things that we need or want and we can readily ask God for them. However, we are sometimes a lot less inclined to give thanks for the people and things that we already enjoy and can so readily take for granted. A real sign of spiritual growth is when our prayer shifts primarily from petition to thanksgiving. An attitude of gratitude is such a great gift and a sign of a growing spirituality.

Thanksgiving Day is a great civil recognition of our call to give thanks for the blessings God bestows on our nation. Yes, our nation needs healing and so many other blessings. But we also enjoy so many gifts each day – our freedoms, our opportunities to better ourselves and our families, our safety and security, our freedom of religion and conscience. We have so much for which to be grateful as we gather to celebrate Thanksgiving Day.

As Catholics our thanksgiving is not restricted to one Thursday in November, but is at the very heart of our Eucharist every Sunday, in fact every day. The word ‘Eucharist’ means thanksgiving and to give thanks is the primary reason we gather to celebrate Eucharist. We join our lives to the perfect sacrifice of Christ as we pray in gratitude for the gift of Christ Jesus, our life through His death and resurrection and all the blessings that we daily experience.

Unfortunately too many Catholics think that Mass should primarily be a spiritual high and feel that if that doesn’t happen, then why bother. We don’t come to the Eucharist in order to get a good spiritual feeling or even a new spiritual message though sometimes we will be so blessed. We come to the Eucharist to say Thank You, God for my faith in Christ and for all the spiritual and material blessings that I daily enjoy. I encourage you to come to Mass each time with a specific blessing that you wish to give thanks for that day. It can be a person in your life, an experience that you have had, a blessing that you received. Develop that attitude of gratitude and let it permeate your prayer.

Every Mass I celebrate I offer a special word of gratitude for each of you, parishioners of Ascension. I am so very grateful for your life of faith, for your service to Christ both within and beyond our parish boundaries, your commitment to share the faith with your children and others, your faithful living of our Catholic life as disciples of Christ. You are truly a blessing to me and I thank God daily for you!

God’s Blessings!

Father Tom

GETTING TO KNOW SARAH

By Sarah Streitwieser



My name is Sarah Streitwieser, and I feel deeply blessed to introduce myself as the new Family Life Coordinator for our Parish. My husband Tim and I have been happily married for 13 years. As converts to Catholicism, we have both been Catholic for almost 12 years. We have been blessed with 5 children: Timothy (10), Lilly (8), Rosemary (8), Vivian (6) and Cecilia (4). Being a wife and mother are my first and favorite jobs!

My educational and work background has been primarily in the area of business and accounting. However, I have been involved in different Ascension ministries over the past few years. My husband and I volunteer as NFP promoters and also serve on the Evangelization Committee. I have worked and written with the Ascent Committee for a few years also. You may also recognize my family from the Greeter and Donut Ministries – we are likely the ones dropping bulletins and spilling orange juice!

As a Catholic family, Tim and I joke that we are not about to win any awards! Our kids are not always perfectly behaved in Mass or even as thoroughly catechized as I wish they were. Tim and I are not perfect parents or perfect spouses. Our hope – or at least what we strive for – is to do the little things well. We want to be a family that is intentional about our faith; we want Jesus's love and plan for us to integrate into every area of our lives. We are humbled in this as we try, and fail, and try again. We want to be a family where the love of Christ can flourish, where forgiveness and mercy are present (and needed daily!), and where faith can grow.

I hope to grow with our parish in the same familial (and sometimes imperfect) love that I share with my spouse and children. Thank you for letting me grow with you. Also, please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions, concerns, or big ideas!



CHILDREN'S YOUTH FAITH FORMATION PROGRAMS

By William O'Leary



Children's Liturgy of the Word

8:15AM Mass

Children leave Mass during the Liturgy of the Word to explore the Gospel at their age level and then return after the Offertory. We have a number of great leaders who help the scriptures come to life for them. All our young children ages 4-8 years are invited! No need to pre-register, just join us during Mass!



Kids 4 Christ (K4C)

10:00AM Mass

Pre-School 3 & 4 year olds and Kindergarten

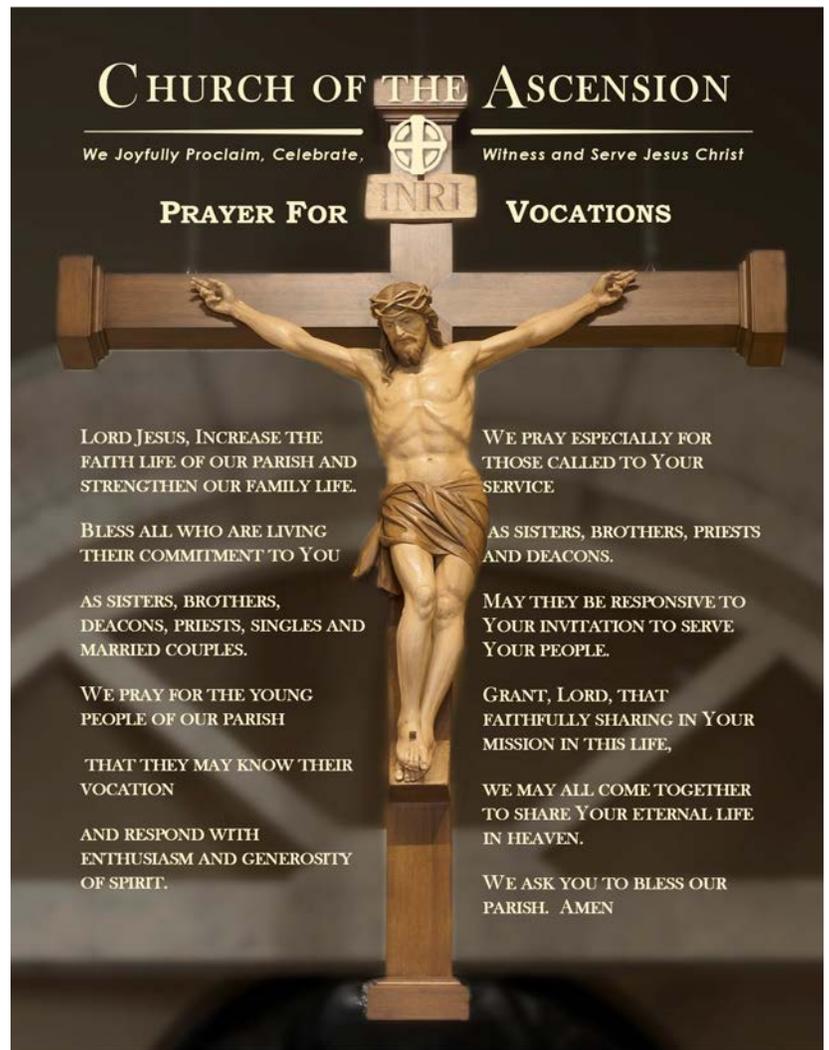
Parents drop their kids off in a classroom before the 10:00am Mass where they learn about important people and events of the Bible through stories, songs and crafts. Parents pick up their kids after Mass. It's a great experience for our young parishioners! To register, please call (913) 681-7683.

For questions about either program call (913) 681-7683.

What's in a vocation? Is it simply what we do for the rest of our lives? In his prayer for vocations, Pope St. John Paul II reveals the essence of "Vocation." He prays that young people "look to [Mary]... who [has] known the agitation of a young heart when faced with the eternal plan of God. Make them able to accept the invitation of your Son to give their lives wholly for the glory of God. Make them understand that to serve God satisfies the heart and that only in the service of God and His kingdom do we realize ourselves in accordance with the Divine plan, and life becomes a hymn of glory to the most Holy Trinity." To distill a bit, we can't be happier than when we follow His plan for us!

The mission of our ministry is to help parishioners find this level of happiness that God calls each of us to. That is: To assist parishioners in listening to God's call for what he has planned for their life—be it priest, religious sister, deacon, religious brother, single or married. Our effort to foster vocations has two basic parts. The first is prayer. Attention to prayer for vocations is being promoted through activities such as "31 Club" and "Traveling Crucifix." The second part is in building strong peer groups, those for young and those for adults, that educate for and foster holy vocations (we're all called to them!). Snapshot of prayer focus to date (things anyone can participate in):

The "31 Club" is a national program and is simple in its existence. Parishioners are asked to sign up for a day (same day every month) to pray for vocations. When signing up, the parishioner chooses any date of the month—from 1 to 31—that suits him/her, then commits to offer a Mass, offer an hour in the Adoration Chapel, or in some way pray for vocations and the mission of the Vocations Ministry, on that same day every month over the following year. No dues for the 31 Club! If you're well enough to pray, you're in!



The "Traveling Crucifix" is a picture of our beautiful Crucifix at Ascension (thus tying in the whole community when we pray) with the vocations prayer written to the side of the picture. Our goal is that each weekend the Crucifix will be presented at one Mass. Families will pre-register their interest in serving as the Host Family for a week. The presentation will rotate among all the Masses. One week will be at 4:30, the next week at 8:15, etc. Each family that signs up to pray for the week will keep both the picture as well as the prayer book we will be giving them. No fees for this one either! Just lots of prayer!

Want to know more about Vocations Ministry? Feel called to be more involved? Contact Jim Burns at 913-563-5881.



Join with us in prayer for those touched by suicide.

Guest House shares the following statement offered on June 8, 2018, by Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE) to provide information and direction in an effort to increase awareness of suicide and to help prevent such tragedies. We know that those touched by suicide live in your dioceses, religious communities and parish communities, and we hope you will find what is included here to be helpful.

There has been a lot of news coverage this week about the tragic deaths of Kate Spade and Anthony Bourdain, as well as the just released CDC Report on the increase in suicides. SAVE expresses our heartfelt and deep sorrow to both the Spade and Bourdain families during this very painful and difficult time. We work daily with families touched by suicide and recommend that the media and the public allow the families time and space to grieve their loss.

SAVE is at the forefront of working to prevent suicide and be a resource for those touched by suicide. Research has shown that when there is news about celebrity deaths by suicide, there is an increased risk of copycat suicide. That is why we want to share a few key messages at this time:

- ◆ Use caution when talking about suicide rates. While suicide rates are increasing, there is no epidemic of suicide. We do not want people to panic given the media coverage on the topic, but rather use this as an opportunity to raise awareness and educate people about the realities of suicide and that it is preventable in most cases.
- ◆ Suicide is a public health crisis and more needs to be done at all levels of our government and in our communities to prevent these tragedies. Actions you can take:
- ◆ Learn the warning signs of suicide. Although it may not always be obvious, individuals experiencing an emotional crisis usually exhibit one or more of the warning signs of suicide. Your ability to identify the signs will better prepare you to take action and could help save a life.
- ◆ Be aware of and able to share resources in your community and nationally. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255) and the Crisis Text Line (text Hello to 741 741) are free and available 24/7. Local crisis services, school counselors, Employee Assistance Programs and other service providers are available for those who need to talk with someone.
- ◆ Call your Senators and Representatives in Congress and state legislators and tell them more funding for research, education and treatment is needed now.
- ◆ Check in with people you know and who you are worried about. Extensive media coverage on suicide can increase worry, distress and fears that they too might not be able to survive if a respected or admired celebrity cannot. Call, email, text or go see someone who might be at increased risk and ask them how they are doing. Here are a few tips to keep in mind when you are asking someone if they've been considering suicide. Know that ASKING ABOUT SUICIDE will not increase their risk of death. It may be the one thing that keeps them from dying.
- ◆ Suicide is not the answer to life's adversities. In fact, everyone faces challenges in life and most people cope effectively through difficult times. When someone you know is struggling, offer your genuine concern and support to seek help. You don't have to be a doctor to help save someone's life. If you are struggling, know that you are never alone and you do not have to solve your problems on your own. Use this list of crisis resources in the USA to find the best help option for you.



More information on suicide prevention and coping with a suicide loss can be found at save.org.

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“We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature - trees, flowers, grass- grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence... We need silence to be able to touch souls.” -- Mother Teresa

There are moments in my life that the noise around me is so deafening it almost seems quiet. The roar of what is happening around me becomes almost muted in the day to day activities. About a year ago, I felt so far away from God, so detached. It was an odd sort of feeling, there was no anger, nothing terrible had happened, there was no real frustration with Him, nothing I could pinpoint, but yet I felt so very far away from the close relationship I was so used to having with Jesus. It felt as though He was standing right in front of me with a thin layer of glass separating us, just enough to block sound and touch.

I felt stuck in this deep spiritual void and the noise of my life kept me very distracted. I took multiple trips to the confessional, and many wonderful priests listened to me talk about how God was so far from me. I felt a pull in many directions expect towards Jesus. Yet, I felt no angst towards this drift and that scared me. The longer my spiritual drought went on, the more I became concerned. I began to wonder if my prayers were done in vain, wondering if this was faith after 40? Had I entered some spiritual wasteland where I knew the dance, knew God was always near, but had pushed Him away subconsciously with the hustle of life. Had my everyday problems become so pressing that to “pray about it” was easy to say but much harder to do?

I turned to Facebook to air out my follies, ask advice from all of my “close” friends, put pictures online of the kids, and share important family moments with all of my social circle without first sharing them with God. Instead of turning to the adoration chapel to pray, I was turning to gossip and not even a breath of prayer to the Holy Spirit to guide me. How very LOUD my life had become, the everyday had become a deafening roar. I needed to claw my way out of the spiritual hole I had created and in the silence I found Him.



I attended a retreat in April where I confessed that my relationship with God was more at the acquaintance level rather than that of a close friendship. As I began my penance, I became increasingly frustrated. Next to me in the chapel was a young mother and her small baby. The baby was fussing as the mother was gently trying to calm her down, yet the little one next to me became more and more upset, and her cries muted out the sound of her mother. Reaching the point of utter irritation, God spoke to me loud and clear, as if sitting right next to me He whispered, “That, my Child, is what it has been like to talk to you.”

In my vanity, I had blamed this distant relationship on so many different things, but never looked internally. I was not looking at myself, not seeing how very loud I had made my life, not noticing the gentle nudge or the quiet whisper our Lord was giving to me daily. My day was filled with noise from every direction, and I was never trying to quiet my mind to hear. How many of us do this daily? When do we accept the silence, live in the silence if even for a minute to hear the voice of God gently whispering our names, calling to us to join Him, to hand over our distractions, to sit with Him and pray?

We aren’t so different from His apostles the night He was handed over – Jesus asked for them to join Him in prayer, and they could not even give their friend that, even in His darkest hour. Could you sit with Jesus for an hour, silence yourself for 10 minutes to listen? Or has the noise become too much; with too many distractions have you lost your way? I would challenge you in this holiday season to find 5 minutes a day to be completely silent. Put your phone away, turn off the radio, instead of turning to social media for a time out, turn to your rosary and pray for those friends instead of “liking” one of their photos. Find beauty in the silence, give yourself the gift of reconnecting with your prayer life and those around you, join Christ in prayer and let Him speak to you in the quiet.

WE WERE CALLED TO SHARE

By Mary Jo Doherty 

Fifteen years ago Father Tom cornered my husband, Phil, and me at a church function and asked us to do him a favor. He said he needed a “lay couple” to speak at the Masses on behalf of the Archbishop’s upcoming Call to Share campaign. He said we would speak for approximately 5 minutes at the conclusion of all Masses one weekend during the campaign to encourage our parishioners to give as generously as possible to this important endeavor.

The Archbishop’s Call to Share is an appeal to raise funds for approximately 40 ministries that are supplemented by money from our Archdiocese. We wondered how we could influence anyone in only 5 minutes about the needs of so many. So....we thought that maybe we could pick only ONE of the 40 ministries on the list, research it, visit with the director and make a personal visit to the facility so that we could get a feel for what was happening there and determine how we could put into words what contribution money could do to help those who might not be able to help themselves. We thought this assignment was for only one year, but Father Tom must have been happy with our effort because this year we will be presenting our 15th appeal as the lay couple for Call to Share. I felt a need to write down some of our experiences, not only because we have learned so much and deepened our faith so much because of it, but also to show how much love and influence Father Tom has had on people in our parish by just saying the words, “I was wondering if you would do me a favor.”



Our first year, in 2004, we chose to talk about Villa St. Francis, the Catholic, non-profit skilled nursing facility in Olathe, which is sponsored by the Archdiocese. We went to do our research and toured the entire facility, visiting with nurses, caregivers and residents. The atmosphere was warm, loving and compassionate and we could feel God’s love protecting everyone with the dignity they deserved. As we approached the end of the hall where three nuns resided, we saw a “GO CHIEFS” pennant on the door of one of the nuns’ rooms. We were told that everyone knew how much this nun loved the Denver Broncos, so the other nuns posted a Chiefs banner on her door where it was visible for all to see and enjoy. We immediately knew that there was also fun and joy living in this home. Could we make people understand the need to help this wonderful place where everyone on staff was unselfishly serving the medical and spiritual needs of these residents with excellence and honor? We could only try.....in 5 minutes.

The second year we decided, with Father Tom, that we would visit El Centro, a social service agency for Hispanics. I have to admit that we did not know anything about El Centro, and this one opened our eyes to a whole new world. El Centro is about three things.....helping families build assets, accessing educational opportunities and assisting families in temporary crisis. We found attorneys and interpreters who accompany people to court or legal situations to interpret the language and help them understand the process of the law. We learned of adult education programs and continuing education classes....and a senior center. It was also a crisis center to assist families with medical or financial issues. There was a computer lab to help students and adults learn computer skills, a day care center and a food pantry and store where families could come to get Christmas gifts for their loved ones...free. In fact, all of the services were FREE. We were moved beyond words watching the enthusiasm of the staff and the volunteers who work there...not for money....but for the love of helping someone in need. This agency was a lifeline on a day to day basis for Hispanic families in so many ways. Some of their funding came directly from the Archbishop’s Call to Share. We had to tell people. El Centro needed help.

WE WERE CALLED TO SHARE (CONT'D).

In year three we spoke about Catholic Charities. While we thought we knew something about Catholic Charities, we were surprised to learn of the many things that they do, such as supervising and coordinating charitable activities, including the receipt and allocation of funds and property donated for charity, the care and custody of children and the maintenance of the social welfare of people in need. We were told that most of the people who seek help there are not truly homeless or penniless, but have usually hit a bump in the road or some bad times resulting from loss of a job, car problems or temporary financial issues. This agency provides emergency help, counseling, day care, job searches, help with utilities and domestic violence. The Call to Share money provided by the Archdiocese is vital to continue this work. Where could we even start our speech?

In year four we talked about the Catholic Education Foundation. The Director of Catholic Education Foundation stressed to us that education is the “key” to the future of the Catholic Church. The Foundation, itself, is responsible for distributing \$1.2 million in scholarships to children who cannot afford a catholic education but whose parents want to provide one. At the time we were there, 10 years ago, there was a waiting list of almost 400 students who needed help. Our Call to Share dollars have been partially responsible for the scholarships in all Catholic schools and we realized again why we were doing this mission.

In the years that followed we visited and presented information to you on several more of the 40 Call to Share ministries such as Prairie Star Ranch, Donnelly College, Project Rachel, St. Lawrence Center at KU, Camp Tekawitha, and Christ’s Peace House of Prayer and others. In the Ascents to come, I hope to tell you more about each of these ministries so that you can better understand the purpose and uses of your contributions.

Phil and I have had an amazing journey and we have learned how much the Catholic Church actually does for people in need. It has opened our eyes to the meaning of the word “help”. We have never been able to put into our talks the emotions we have felt as we researched and visited these places. Five minutes each year has only touched the surface of what we have found. We have told many people that the two of us have “received” WAY more than we have been able to “give back” in our limited time, but we hope that we have at least given out enough information to help you understand SOME of the need. Maybe Father Tom knew that WE needed a “shot in the arm” and he gave us this job for a reason. Who knows? But we are grateful to him for choosing us and we remain amazed and overwhelmed at the charity work of the Catholic Church. We are thankful to God for this opportunity that we have had to be a small part of this great mission of Call to Share.





CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

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It seems like every Advent article or family devotional that I read circles back to the same point, that busyness inhibits spiritual growth and that Advent is a time to be still and contemplative. But, while I think this is sound advice, and I agree that it is worthwhile to cut unnecessary obligations and activities, there is a certain degree of busyness that seems to be unavoidable.

There are Christmas gifts to buy and wrap, parties to attend, travel arrangements to make, luggage to be packed, kid Christmas programs to enjoy, and school parties to make overly complicated treats for. Plus, I have all of the regular obligations that go along with being a wife and mother. Most importantly, I have the great task of preparing myself and my family for our coming Lord. And although I am thankful for and even enjoy all of these obligations, they (to put it bluntly) make me very busy.

For years I assumed that my own busyness was a symptom of spiritual failing. I tried to reject my own reality rather than embrace it. I saw myself as being totally unlike Mary (and therefore presumed Mary was totally unlike me, and therefore unable to relate to my situation).

Too often I have supposed I understood Mary's holiness and perfection, but have mistaken these qualities for boringness, blandness, or a type of holy-ineptitude. When I really consider and meditate upon the early accounts of her motherhood, I find that she was none of these things. She was dynamic, seemingly always moving, full of life, and even busy.

From the earliest moments of conception and all through Jesus's early life, the only accounts that we have of Mary show her moving. Just after the annunciation we are told that she traveled "in haste" to visit her cousin Elizabeth in Judah (Luke 1:39). She stayed with Elizabeth, caring for her in the late stages of pregnancy for about 3 months, and then returned home (Luke 1:56).

The next scriptural account of Mary shows her traveling to Bethlehem for the census and to give birth (Luke 2:4). 40 days after Jesus's birth she travels to the temple for His presentation (Luke 2:22), and soon after Jesus's presentation, the Holy Family must flee to Egypt to avoid Herod's massacre of infants (Matt 2:14). After some length of time in Egypt, the Holy Family moves back to Nazareth (Matt 2:23). Amidst all of this traveling, Mary must host shepherds, entertain wise men, and setup a home and livelihood in a foreign country.



It is as if something about Mary's love for Jesus propels her to move forward. Mary is both active and contemplative. Externally she is active, moving forward with her circumstances, but internally she is contemplative, fully consumed with her Son. She cradles Him and adores Him, tucked quietly in her womb or beneath the folds of her garment, cradled against her breast and heart as she journeys.

Mary is busy, both like and unlike me. Unlike me, her busyness is never in vain. Charity compels her journey to Elizabeth, legal requirement necessitates her travel to Bethlehem, religious obligation (and the interior obligation of her heart) moves her to the temple for presentation, and the welfare of her Child forces her exile to Egypt. Mary's busyness is fruitful; it is not self-inflating, superfluous, or frantic.

But perhaps just like me (or at least similar-ish to me) Mary's busyness is necessary. Her vocation as a wife and mother compel her to move, work, and accomplish. External circumstances, events that she cannot (and does not try to) control necessitate her movement. But, through all of her action, she contemplates. She literally carries Jesus in her womb and in her arms. He is her only focus and purpose, though she is busy with many things.

This Advent I hope to embrace my own busyness rather than fight, ignore, or be shamed by it. Like Mary, there are necessities of my vocation that I cannot shirk, there are circumstances that I cannot control. But also like her I want to carry Jesus with me as I go. I want Him to be my purpose and my focus. I want love of Him (and love of my family) to inform my movement. This Advent, I want to be both active and contemplative, moving with Mary and centered on Jesus.



Do you ever find it difficult to imagine the Nativity with fresh eyes and an open heart? Do you find it particularly challenging to avail yourself to new spiritual insights from a story you have (most likely) heard so many times? How do you share the true joy of the Christmas story with your family if it is challenging for you to enter into the reality of it yourself? St. Ignatius encouraged others to prayerfully enter into Christ's presence by imagining His life from different perspectives. One could enter as another person explicitly involved in a particular event, as an unseen observer who watches Jesus from a distance, or even as an inanimate object (i.e. one could even imagine being the hay in Jesus's manger). St. Ignatius encouraged silence, and for meditation to sink deep rather than spread broad.

Perhaps more than any other story or Biblical encounter, the story of Jesus's birth invites us to wonder. Imagine Joseph and Mary (who is probably already in the early stages of labor) as they journey toward Bethlehem. Grow with Mary in the late stages of pregnancy. Wonder with Joseph at the miracle of spiritual conception.

Imagine Jesus newly born – literally the God of all creation embodied in a downy-skinned, heart-faced infant. Imagine His legs curled up in fetal position and His little feet, puffy and rounded out, so many months away from being ready to walk.

Perhaps His arms are flailing because He does not yet have the capacity to control His own limbs. Mary swaddles Him to help Him rest. What is it like to cradle God, made present to the world as an infant? Consider the dissonance or contradiction Mary and Joseph must feel – Jesus has made Himself willingly reliant on them, but they are ultimately fully dependent upon Him. Does this seem like a curious way to accomplish the salvation of the world?

Take a moment to behold this beautiful spiritual reality, now, plunge the scene into actual human reality. Consider the dirty stable, perhaps the “mess” of birth, the muck of the manger, the noise of animals, and the smell of manure. Next, imagine the shepherds – scruffy, unpolished, and unbathed – crowding in the already cramped quarters. How ordinary – even less than ordinary or well below average – the initial moments of Christ's human life must have seemed. Have you ever experienced extraordinary works of God that were cloaked in ordinary human experience? Has the humanity of life ever prevented you from noticing or appreciating the miracles that surround you?

If you find yourself unable to experience the Christmas story as fully as you would like, go back and read the text in the Bible (Luke 2:1-20; Mat. 1:1-2:12). Try reading slowly until a particular detail or phrase sticks out. Sit with that thought for a while. Don't be afraid of silence and don't feel discouraged if nothing “happens.”

Entering into the mysteries of Jesus's life is ultimately a grace that comes by way of asking, not by forcing your own will or trying harder. “Seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened” (Matt 7:7). Repetition may prepare your heart for receptivity, but ultimately it is Jesus who teaches and God who causes growth.

The guided meditation on the following page is just one suggestion on how to imagine or pray the story of Jesus's birth. The ideas in this meditation are not meant to be presented as facts, but rather as possibilities. You can use this as an aid to prayer if it is helpful, or skip it if not.

PRAYING THE NATIVITY (CONT'D.), GUIDED MEDITATION

Your Mother remains at peace as hints and rumors of her pregnancy circle. She has no reason to explain or defend herself against the questioning looks of others. Her only desire is to please You; her only purpose is to bear You to and for others. God the Father's plan for provision is not made known to her, but her trust is not dependent on circumstance. She reposes herself within Your love and waits upon the Holy Spirit.

Joseph's initial reaction is both merciful and righteous. Moral law prohibits marriage in this situation; however, the law of charity within his heart prevents him from exposing Mary to shame or punishment. He finds a way to adhere to the law while protecting Your Mother, by planning to divorce her in secret. By faith Mary remains fully immersed in Your presence, but this does not erase her feelings of deep sorrow. She sees Joseph's distress and disappointment, and She carries his heavy burden in her own heart.

I am reminded again of how dissimilar I am to Your Mother; I want to force my desired outcome with explanations of self-defense. But she is content to wait, and she calmly bids me to wait alongside her. Mary is endlessly and joyfully submissive to You, to her Heavenly Father, and to the Holy Spirit – her Spiritual Spouse. Here, I find she is freely submissive to her earthly spouse too. She waits for the Holy Spirit to guide Joseph and is happy to follow him rather than lead.

It is by Mary's docility and intercession that Joseph is able to hear Your plan spoken through angelic dream. With perfect obedience he accepts Your Mother in marriage and receives You as his foster Son. Without question Joseph believes all that You show him.

The timing of Your birth corresponds directly with the required census. I find myself wanting to intervene again. Why ought Your Mother travel when she is so far along in her pregnancy? Could the journey be dangerous for You and her? But Joseph and Your Mother remain meek to this obligation. They see no dichotomy between God's will and human condition, and they do not crave comfort above affliction.

Your parents enter overcrowded Bethlehem. "No room," is their only greeting. I suddenly realize the deeper truth hidden in the innkeeper's refrain. There truly is no room for You here, not among busied and full people, all determined to be and do, all employed by agendas and pride. I take a moment to notice my own heart; I find myself as overfilled and preoccupied as Bethlehem. How I long to be more like the stable, uncontrived and simple, overlooked by others, open and waiting for You.

Your parents remain humble in trust, praising the Father's goodness when they receive their modest accommodations. Perhaps whatever preparations they made for Your arrival had to be left in Nazareth. It is with empty hands and open hearts that they enter the stable of Your birth. You are born into nothing, placing Yourself beneath rather than above.

You are born in perfect humility. The light from the night star unfolds above You, circling You in a halo of warmth and wonder. Though angelic choruses fill the December sky, Bethlehem is not quiet enough to hear. Though a large star rests itself above Your stable, only a few men from the east will focus their eyes to see.

Your mother wraps You in linens, kissing the palms of Your hands and the arches of Your feet before tucking each arm and leg into Your swaddling clothes. For a brief moment, I skip forward and see Your Mother receiving Your crucified body in a similar way. I see her wrap You in linen grave clothes, binding You in Your humanity then as she does now, swaddling You in a love that You will not untie.

Infant Jesus laid in manger, make me as lowly and simple as You. Silence my heart that I can hear the angels' hymn; focus my eyes that I may see the light of Your star. Make me as lowly as the shepherds, that I may be your guest.



All make the sign of the cross

Leader: Our help is in the name of the Lord.

Response (R/.): Who made heaven and earth.

Read Scripture Passage from Isaiah 9:1-2, 5-6

Reader: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
Upon those who lived in a land of gloom a light has shone.
You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing;
They rejoice before you as people rejoice at harvest,
as they exult when dividing the spoils.

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us;
upon his shoulder dominion rests.
They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever,
Prince of Peace.

His dominion is vast and forever peaceful,
Upon David's throne, and over his kingdom,
which he confirms and sustains
By judgment and justice, both now and forever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this!
The Word of the Lord.

R/. Thanks be to God.

Join Hands

Leader: Lord our God,
we praise you for your Son, Jesus Christ:
he is Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples,
he is the wisdom that teaches and guides us,
he is the Savior of every nation.
Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we light the candles
of this wreath.
May the wreath and its light be a sign of Christ's promise
to bring us salvation.
May he come quickly and not delay.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R/. Amen.

Conclude the blessing with a verse from "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel":

*O come, desire of nations, bind
in one the hearts of humankind;
bid ev'ry sad division cease
and be thyself our Prince of peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.*



CALLING FOR LENT SMALL GROUP LEADERS!



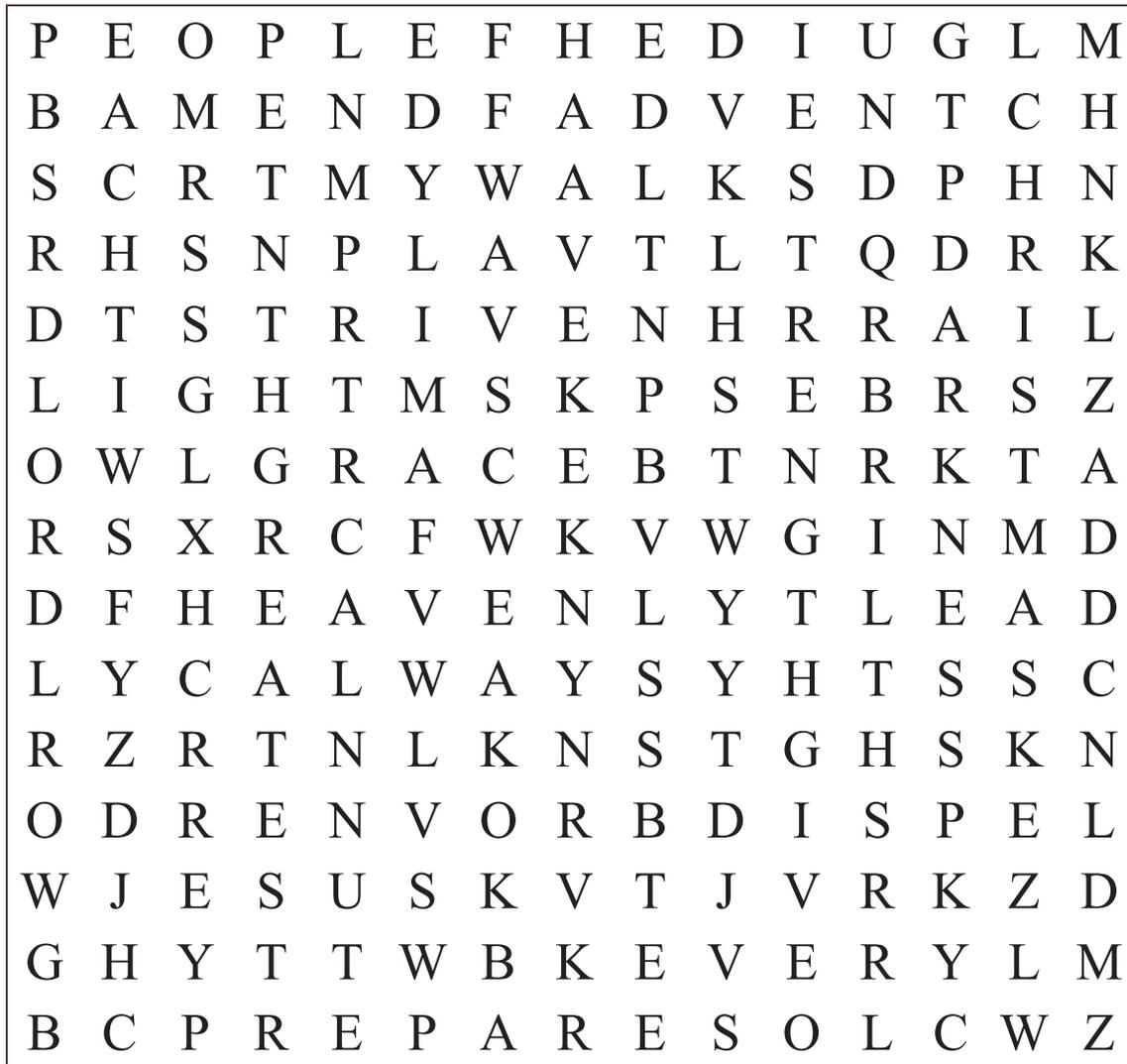
At Ascension Parish, we have so many wonderful parishioners who have, “Open Hearts”.... kind, faith-filled individuals who reach out to those in need of a smile, a hug, a friendly wave or a listening ear.

I am now calling on those with an “Open Heart” to see if you would consider having an “Open Home”. We are looking ahead and making plans for Lent (I know... it’s not even Advent yet!). But our planning is starting now as we are hoping to do something really BIG and wonderful again this year!

If you are willing to lead a small group (8-10 people) in your home this Lent (March-April) please reply today! Materials and training will be provided to leaders in January. We would really love to have some “family friendly” homes.... Ones where participants can bring their kids with them.

We would like the homes lined up before Christmas. Please call or email Liz Willman, Director of Adult Faith at lwillman@kcascesion.org or 913-681-3348 ext. 139 today!





(Find the underlined words)

Advent Prayer for Families

Heavenly Father, your son, Jesus, is your greatest gift to us, a great sign of your love. Guide us as we strive to walk in that love together as a family this Advent. As we prepare our hearts for Christmas, bring us closer to each other and to your son. Give us the grace and strength we need every day. Help us to always trust in you. Come, Lord Jesus, lead all people closer to you. Come and dispel the darkness of our world with the light of your love. Amen.

