

DECEMBER 2020



# THE ASCENT

*A Quarterly Publication of Church of the Ascension*



**CELEBRATE THE  
CHRISTMAS SEASON**

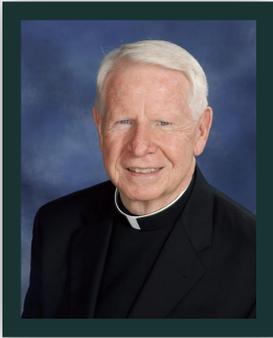
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December 2020



Dear Fellow Parishioners,

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us!” These words from the Nicene Creed that we proclaim each Sunday express the heart of our faith. Yes, the Eternal Word of God took on our human nature and became one with us in all things but sin. He did so that we might be freed from sin and have hope and the promise of eternal life.

The truth of the Incarnation – God taking on our humanity in Jesus – is fundamental to our life and hope as human beings and as Christians. This great mystery of God’s love challenges us to accept the unbelievable. We are so precious in God’s eyes that He has chosen to share our life and our brokenness to the full. What tremendous love God has for all of humanity and for each of us as His beloved children. One translation of the Prologue in St. John’s Gospel states “He pitched His tent among us.” I love that image of the Incarnation. The Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, makes his dwelling with us so that we might ultimately make our dwelling with Him. The Incarnation is transformational for all of humanity and for each of us as individuals.

Many people, even among Catholics, really don’t believe in the Incarnation. Jesus is just a good person, a wonderful model and a great teacher, but He is only human. This heresy called Arianism has been with the Church for a long time...all the way from the 3rd century. But Jesus is not just a good human being, He is the Word become flesh for our salvation. Without his divinity within our humanity there is no salvation, no freedom from sin, no promise of eternal life. The Incarnation is absolutely fundamental to our faith as Christians. In fact without that belief we are not truly Christian.

I am particularly aware of this as we prepare for Christmas this year because a recent poll of Catholics indicates that many who claim to be Catholic express a lack of belief in the mystery of the Incarnation. That is alarming to me. As Catholics we need to get back to some of the basics of our faith which is based not on human opinion, but on the revelation of God especially through Christ as manifested in the Scriptures, Tradition and the sacramental life of the Church. Without the fundamentals of our faith we are aimless and, even worse, shipwrecked. We have nothing solid on which to base our life or understand its purpose. But with a clear acceptance of God’s self-revelation in Jesus, we are firmly grounded on the foundation that Christ has given to the Church and to each of us.

This year as we celebrate Christmas, let’s get beyond the superficial and go to the heart of why we celebrate Christmas. While many things add to the celebration like lights, presents, delicious foods, parties, none of these is really what the feast is about. We need to focus on the stable of Bethlehem and on the revelation that the Word has become flesh and dwells among us for our eternal salvation. This is the wonder of Christmas, the mystery of God’s abundant love for each of us.

Christmas Blessings,

Fr. Tom



Growing up in a small town of 1200 truly was a special experience. Not only did I know everyone in town, when I was in my early years of school, everyone who happened to live in Victoria, Kansas was a Catholic! At the center of it all was our beautiful historical church called the Cathedral of the Plains, now also known as the Basilica of St. Fidelis. The amazing 144-foot twin spires can be seen for miles to travelers along Interstate 70. For those who have yet to visit this National Historical Site, I can guarantee you, it will be worth the stop.

Christmas time was always very special for me growing up. Being from a family of six kids, all left-handers – by the way, we had large family gatherings in a rather small 4-bedroom ranch style home with only one small bathroom. There was always that eager anticipation for Christmas Eve, when we would all gather and open presents. It was always fun to watch my parents open

their gifts, especially my mom. She would tear a piece of paper off, converse with everyone, tear off another piece and begin visiting again. We would say, “Mom, you need to get finished if we want to make it to midnight Mass in four hours!” Eventually, we would head to St. Fidelis for Midnight Mass, with Christmas hymns sung by an amazing community choir. In time, Patty and I were blessed to be a part of this unique choir. Midnight Mass was also a time we would see old friends and classmates who were back in town to celebrate Christmas with their respective families. As a kid, Christmas Day was usually spent with aunts and uncles, which allowed us time to play and hang out with our cousins.

More recently, those family gatherings for Christmas do not happen as much for us. My mother and father are both now deceased, my sibling’s families have started their own traditions, and church and liturgy commitments most often keep us from traveling back to see family. However, one of our more recent traditions has become very important to me. A few years ago, we decided as a family, that instead of buying gifts for each other, we would take the money we would have spent on individual presents and put it into a collection for the missions. My cousin, Fr. Peter Meis, is a Capuchin priest in the Southern Highlands Papua, New Guinea. Monies sent to the missionaries tend to go a long way to help assist with schools and other needs of the Church. Fr. Peter’s sister Marise is a Saint Agnes sister, serving in the mission field in Rosita, Nicaragua.

Today, being a new deacon in the Archdiocese and being assigned to Ascension has been a real gift and a great blessing to me. We have a wonderful and vibrant parish with wonderful liturgies and events throughout the year, and we are so blessed to have a brand new adoration chapel and wonderful priests to shepherd us. These blessings allow us all to grow closer to Christ and experience the deep richness of our Catholic faith. It is my prayer for our parishioners that you will be blessed with an amazing and peaceful Advent and Christmas season. God bless us all, everyone!

**How long is the Christmas season? When are we to take down the Christmas tree and store the Christmas decorations for the next year? I invite you to take this quiz: How long should Catholics continue to celebrate Christmas?**

- A. Until January 1<sup>st</sup> – the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God – the 8th day (octave) of Christmas
- B. Until January 6<sup>th</sup>, traditional Epiphany, the “12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas”.
- C. The feast of the Baptism of the Lord (Sunday after the Sunday celebration of Epiphany)
- D. Super Bowl Sunday (or the feast of the Presentation, whichever comes first)
- E. None of the above: “I’m throwing out my Christmas tree the day after Christmas; I’ve had it up since Thanksgiving and it is so dry and brittle that a spark of static electricity will send everything up in smoke!”

If you answered “A” or “B”, you get partial credit. If you answered “D” or “E”, I’m at least glad that you picked up *The Ascent* to read this article. Please continue to read. Even if you correctly answered “C”, do you know why?

It seems strange that the Christmas season should continue until the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. The historical explanation:

In the early Church, Christians, particularly those in the East, celebrated the coming of Christ on Jan. 6. On that festive day known as Epiphany, the Church celebrated not only the Nativity but also the visitation of the Magi, the Baptism of Christ, and the wedding feast of Cana. By the fourth century, in some dioceses, both Christmas and Epiphany had been set as separate feasts. In 567, the universal Church set these feast days on Dec. 25 and Jan. 6, respectively, and named the twelve days between the feasts as the “Christmas Season.”

But the Christmas season no longer ends on January 6, because eventually, some dioceses, and eventually the entire Church, made the feast of Epiphany more solemn by adding an “octave” – an extension of the celebration for a week after the feast.

When this happened, the Christmas season no longer ended on Epiphany but continued through the octave. The feast of the Baptism of the Lord was eventually placed at the end of the octave... and now, even though there is no longer an official octave of Epiphany, the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord remained in place and the Church continued the Christmas season until the Lord’s baptism.

Okay, so much for the history, but that doesn’t answer the WHY question. Theologically, why is the Lord’s baptism the other bookend to the Christmas season? Why do Catholics continue to sing Christmas hymns for over two weeks after December 25?

Celebrating the miracle of the virgin birth is incomplete if we do not also celebrate and contemplate His Divinity. Jesus is true God and true Man. We cannot celebrate Christmas without also celebrating the maternity of Mary, Mother of God. At the council of Ephesus in 431 and the Council of Chalcedon in 451 the Church upheld the teaching of Mary as *Theotokos*, the God bearer, the Mother of God. More importantly, it declared that Jesus is true God and true man. He is the son of God AND the son of Mary.



Throughout the Octave of Christmas, culminating on January 1<sup>st</sup>, with the celebration of the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, the Church provides us with beautiful liturgies celebrating the infancy and childhood of Jesus. Also included in the Octave is the beautiful feast of the Holy Family which is celebrated on the Sunday following Christmas. To remind us of the “reason for the season” – GOD BECOMING MAN for the purpose of suffering and dying for our salvation, the Church also commemorates the first martyr, St. Stephen on the day after Christmas, St. John the Evangelist on December 27<sup>th</sup> and the feast of the Holy Innocents on December 28<sup>th</sup>. Attending Mass those three days immediately after Christmas is a beautiful way to begin our celebration of the Christmas season.

The life of the son of Mary and Joseph remains mostly hidden for 30 years. His manifestation to the world began with the shepherds and the Magi. With the exception of Mary and Joseph and a few others (John the Baptist comes to mind), the divine nature of Jesus was unknown until the Trinitarian manifestation at the Jordan River. There, the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove and God’s voice from Heaven is heard: “Behold, my son in whom I am well pleased”.

Too many in the world only acknowledge Jesus as a great prophet, or a great teacher or wise sage. The commercialization/ secularization of Christmas results from this mindset. This Christmas and this entire Christmas season – from the Vigil Mass through the Octave of Christmas, the celebration of the Theotokos, Mother of God and continuing to the divine manifestation at the Baptism of the Lord – let us rejoice, celebrate and contemplate our salvation in the coming of the newborn King, Jesus Christ, true God and true man. MERRY CHRISTMAS (season)!

Many of us love the traditional Christmas song, “The 12 Days of Christmas”. In England, during the late 1500’s, Catholics were not permitted to practice their faith openly. According to tradition, someone during that era wrote this carol as a catechism song for young Catholics. These “code” words helped the children learn their faith.

The partridge in a pear tree was Jesus Christ.

Two turtle doves were the Old and New Testaments.

Three French hens stood for Faith, Hope and Love.

Four calling birds were the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Five Golden rings recalled the Torah or Law – the first 5 books of the Old Testament.

Six geese a laying stood for the 6 days of creation.

Seven Swans a swimming represented the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit and the 7 Sacraments.

Eight maids a milking were the 8 Beatitudes.

Nine ladies dancing were the 9 fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Ten Lords a leaping were the 10 commandments.

Eleven pipers piping stood for the 11 faithful disciples.

Twelve drummers drumming symbolize the 12 points of belief in the Apostles’ Creed.



Years ago, when my kids were in early elementary school, I had this “creative” idea to make the Christmas Season last longer in our house by celebrating the 12 days of Christmas.

Rather than have an avalanche of presents on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, I announced to my two young children, that we were going to celebrate the 12 days of Christmas – from Christmas to Epiphany on January 6th. We always had left our Christmas tree up until Epiphany anyway so I thought this would be easy. I also thought our Jewish friends have success with the practice of opening one gift per day during their season of Hanukkah. Surely, my children would enjoy a similar tradition of spreading out the gifts longer.

On Christmas Eve we had them open their presents from far away grandparents so they could call and thank them as per our tradition. On Christmas morning they awoke to filled stockings and a gift from Santa. That evening, I pulled out 12 small gifts for each and placed them under the tree.

It did not go well. They immediately wanted to know “Why” they could not open the additional gifts that day. Looking back – maybe I could have explained my rationale better. Maybe I should have started when they were younger. Rather than obsess over what I could have done better, I decided to use the experience to look forward.

They are both young adults living in other cities now. This Christmas season, I plan to write each of them a short note on a trait of theirs that I admire and mail one per day for the 12 days of Christmas. Besides this being a nice “throw back” to when people wrote actual letters to each other, it might have an impact on their current, hectic lives to recall Christ in their lives each day.

Both my kids are engaged to be married in the coming year. I imagine there will be grandchildren down the road. I think my special place in their lives could be “the funny grandma who at Christmas, gives us a little gift each day for 12 days”. That might not be so bad.



## THE SEASON OF CHRISTMAS BEGINS ON DECEMBER 25<sup>TH</sup>



### DID YOU KNOW?

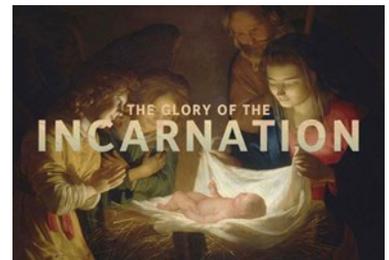
- The Church celebrates the Octave of Christmas (8 days) as if it's one continual "day."
- But it doesn't end there – the Christmas Season goes until the Baptism of the Lord - this year that is January 10<sup>th</sup>.
- The 12 Days of Christmas Song was created during a time in Great Britain when Catholicism was illegal. It's meant to remember the gift of our Catholic Faith between December 25<sup>th</sup> and the Feast of the Epiphany (traditionally January 6<sup>th</sup>). For more on the meaning of each day go to page 4. of this Ascent
- The Liturgical Color is white for the Christmas Season!

### WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS?

Advent prepares us to celebrate not only the historical coming of the Son of God, Jesus Christ on December 25<sup>th</sup>, but it also prepares us to celebrate when Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead. If we live our lives faithful to the Gospel and to God's ways we have so much to look forward to as we prepare to be with God in Heaven. The incarnation is central to our Faith. The Word became flesh the Catechism says (#457-460) for 4 reasons:

1. The Word became flesh for us in order to save us by reconciling us with God.
2. The Word became flesh so that we might know God's love.
3. The Word became flesh to be our model of holiness.
4. The Word became flesh to make us partakers of the divine nature.

This is Good News! This is cause for great rejoicing! This is the reason for our hope!



### IDEAS FOR CELEBRATING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON:

#### MAKE A CAKE FOR JESUS AND SING HAPPY BIRTHDAY

On Christmas Eve or Christmas Day have a meal together followed by the lighting of the Christ candle on your Advent wreath, and then read the Scripture account of Jesus' birth. After that have cake for Jesus. Consider a chocolate cake, representing sin. Fill it with some type of filling (maybe strawberry, raspberry or cherry), representing the blood of Jesus, and cover it with white frosting which represents our new life in Christ.

# CHRISTMAS FORMATION (CONTINUED)

## IDEAS FOR CELEBRATING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON (CONTINUED):

### OPEN GIFTS DURING THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

Consider not opening all your gifts on Christmas Day so you can stretch it out through the Christmas Season – maybe grandparents, aunts and uncle’s gifts are reserved to open during the Octave of Christmas.



### KEEP DECORATIONS UP DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON (NOT JUST ADVENT)

No it’s not practical but it’s Catholic. Keep your decorations up through the Christmas Season. At least through Epiphany, but consider through the Baptism of the Lord – which is the conclusion of the Christmas Season.

### MARK THE FEASTS OF THE FIRST MARTYRS

During the Octave of Christmas the Church celebrates a trio of martyrs’ feasts – St. Stephen on Dec. 26, St. John the Evangelist on Dec. 27 (considered a white martyr) and the Feast of Holy Innocents on December 28. Find out more on the USCCB.org website about these feasts. Do something special in your home to celebrate these feasts. Tell the story of them during dinner. These feasts are important for us to remember that Baby Jesus came not just because that was something cute and precious but the fact that Christ came to take away our sins and He did it by dying on the Cross for us. Following Christ involves real sacrifice and has infinite value.



### DO A FAMILY EXAMEN (TAKEN FROM TEACHINGCATHOLICKIDS.COM)

On January 1, do an “examen” of the life of your family in the past year. If praying the Examen is too formal, go through your calendar month by month, talking about the biggest events. Or go through family photos month by month. As you share memories, talk about the high points and the low points.



### 12 GREAT IDEAS TO CELEBRATE THE CHRISTMAS SEASON



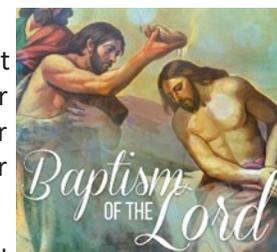
### 5 IDEAS TO CELEBRATE THE EPIPHANY



### CELEBRATE THE FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD (TAKEN FROM TEACHINGCATHOLICKIDS.COM)

The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord marks the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry.

It’s also the perfect time to remember your kids’ baptisms, and to talk about what that means: “Did you know you were baptized, too, just like Jesus?” Tell the story of your child’s baptism. What was the most memorable moment? Why did you ask to have your child baptized? What promises did you have to make? Pull out anything related to your kids’ baptism: a baptismal gown, candle, pictures, or video.



Using fabric markers, make a tablecloth celebrating baptism containing the baptismal dates of everyone in the family; bring it out for meals on the anniversary of each person’s baptism.

# FAVORITE CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

In my family Christmas Eve was always a special time. We had dinner together (observing the fast before the feast) and then later gathered as one of us read the Christmas story from Luke's Gospel. Then we sang some Christmas carols (although there are no great singers in my family, but we tried.) Later we would all go together to Midnight Mass with a big breakfast afterwards about 2:00 a.m. Then we were up early to see what Santa brought and then back to church for a couple more Christmas Masses. In the afternoon all the extended family came over for a great feast, conversation and board games. Many, many good times and happy memories!



**FR. TOM TANK**



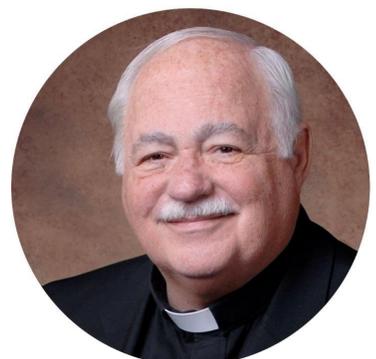
**DEACON KEN  
BILLINGER**

A favorite Christmas tradition for us really only started about fifteen years ago. Family members would struggle to find things to buy for each other. It became more of a challenge than a true giving from the heart. My siblings and I decided that instead of buying for each other, we would put money in a collection to be sent to our cousin who is a missionary Capuchin priest in Papua New Guinea. The dollar goes a lot farther there. Fr. Peter is able to purchase school supplies and other things needed in his village. It is the best way we found to truly experience the meaning of Christmas!

Midnight Mass stands out as one of my favorite traditions. I really loved it when everybody (including the kids) was up and awake and singing Christmas songs, dressed to the finest. It is such a beautiful tradition.

One special memory I have is when I came home from seminary one year for Christmas vacation and our living room was filled with bags of groceries that my mother and her mother, who was living with us, had bought and packaged to deliver to the poor. I was really surprised, and I remember how wonderful it made me feel.

**FR. CHARLES  
MCGLINN**



# FAVORITE CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS



**DEACON JOHN  
STANLEY**

My childhood memory of Christmas Eve immediately comes to mind as one of many great Christmas traditions. Mom would make a special meal for our family—Mom, Dad and seven children (I am the 6<sup>th</sup> of 7). We would then work on a jigsaw puzzle, play other games or just visit about past Christmas memories until 11:00pm when each of the children would then open a designated gift. It would always be a shirt and slacks for the boys and a blouse or dress for the girls. We would don our new clothes and then pile in the station wagon and drive to Midnight Mass. I never remember getting sleepy at the Mass because I was excited about the festivities upon our return home. We would open presents, eat cookies and special snacks. The joy would continue into the wee morning hours.

My family had a tradition that on Christmas Eve we would have a family dinner, (lobster or crab legs, corn, salad, baked potato, etc). Then we would get dressed up to head to the Church of the Holy Martyrs (Vietnamese parish) for the Christmas Pageant at 10:00pm and then stay for the Midnight Mass. After the Midnight Mass we would head home as a family, have dessert, and open presents. Christmas Day we would attend Christmas morning Mass and then head over to my father's side of the family for lunch and later that evening head over to my mother's side of the family for dinner. Christmas was busy and packed, but it was centered on the celebration of the Mass and family.



**FR. VIET  
NGUYEN**



**DEACON KRIS**

One of my fond Christmas memories is what our family did when our daughters were young. After returning home from Christmas Eve Mass, we would have a "picnic" in the living room. We would sit on the floor and watch a Christmas movie while we ate snack foods and drank carbonated grape juice out of wine glasses. Our daughters enjoyed this so much, and their joy was so fun to witness.

## THE PRO-LIFE CHRISTMAS STORY: WE ARE STRONGER THAN OUR CIRCUMSTANCE

MARY AND JOSEPH ARE MODELS OF COURAGE AND FAITH  
BY RYAN BOMBERGER



Renata Sedmakova / shutterstock.com

December 23, 2016 ([LifeSiteNews](#)) — Imagine. Waking up to find that your wife is pregnant ... and you had nothing to do with it. And then, an angel appeared to you telling you that she carried the Hope of humanity within her and *you* were to name him “Jesus”. This could never have been part of any foreseeable plan for a newly married man. How would he cope with a pregnant wife and a marriage that had not yet been consummated? In a culture of undeniable (and *real*) gender inequality, where women were horribly stoned for adultery, he could have divorced her and publicly shamed her.

Joseph could have chosen disgrace, but he chose grace instead. He decided to be stronger than his circumstances.

Imagine, You’re a young virgin bride who has yet to intimately know your Husband, and you’re told by an angel that you have been chosen to carry the

## RESPECT LIFE (CONTINUED)

Savior of the world within your womb. She didn't plan this. But her consent triggered events that would radically change her life, her husband's life, and ... the world. How would she explain this miraculous conception to her husband? How could she even accept that something like this was even possible?

She could have chosen to reject it all. She could have justified it because the timing wasn't "ideal" or felt that their material poverty was sufficient reason not to bring a child into this world. But she decided to be stronger than her circumstances.

Mary and Joseph lived in a violent culture under Roman rule (where infanticide was a common practice) and a ruthless appointed "King of the Jews" — King Herod — who was furious at the prospect of a child becoming the King of the Kings. Herod was a deeply unstable man who had his own family members (including his wife and firstborn son) and many others killed. He was so threatened by what the life of this humanly unplanned but Divinely planned child represented, that he ordered all male children (two years of age and younger) in Bethlehem and the surrounding areas to be slaughtered. With God's divine intervention, Mary and Joseph escaped the brutality of a foolish King hellbent on destroying the Son of God. A devoted husband and his courageous wife had to trust each other and trust the Lord that He would guide them through this earthly uncharted journey. Their lives had purpose. Their unborn son's life had purpose. Mary saw motherhood as a gift, not a burden. She embraced it despite all of the unknowns. And Joseph could have chosen abandonment over fatherhood, but he chose adoption instead. What an illustration of how fathers matter even when the bond isn't biological.

Courage unleashes miracles. This Christmas, may we be reminded of the faith and vulnerability that is required in our own journeys. May we never forget that Christmas is the beginning of God's love story for us and completed in the ultimate act of selfless love — Christ's self-sacrifice on the cross and miraculous resurrection. May we know, in a deeply personal way, how much God loves us enough to offer eternal salvation and the opportunity to be strong, through Him, even in our weaknesses. Merry *Christmas*.

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 [lifesitenews.com/opinion/the-pro-life-christmas-story-we-are-stronger-than-our-circumstances](https://lifesitenews.com/opinion/the-pro-life-christmas-story-we-are-stronger-than-our-circumstances)

I was born and raised in Olathe, and am the second of four boys. My brothers and I often acknowledge that we won the “parent lottery.” I attended St. Paul Catholic School, followed by Olathe High School and then Kansas University. Since 1988, I have practiced law in a small firm. My wife, Jami, and I have been married since 1986, and we have three daughters, Katie, Abbie, and Maggie. We also have two grandchildren who are approaching 4 and 2 years old. We both immensely enjoy spending time with our family. Neither of us really have any serious hobbies aside from our family. Jami has been an awesome mom and grandma, and it shows.

My mom is a convert to Catholicism. My brothers and I understood without being told that attending Mass on Sundays was expected. Despite this and attending a Catholic grade school for 8 years, our faith was not often a topic of family conversation. Although I never left the Church, as an adolescent and young adult, I was merely “checking the boxes.” My faith progressed somewhat when we were married and the kids came along. In 2009, I attended a Christ Renews His Parish retreat at our parish. This dramatically changed the trajectory of my spiritual journey. In about 2013, I started discerning a call to the diaconate. In 2015, the five year formation process began, and by the grace of God I was ordained on June 20, 2020.

Jami and I are thrilled to be assigned to Ascension Parish. I am not very good at remembering names, so I hope that I don’t offend too many parishioners in this way. Although many parishioners thank me for the “sacrifice” of being a deacon, it doesn’t feel like a sacrifice. If anyone deserves thanks, it is Jami. Like the other deacon wives, she constantly, quietly, and humbly supports my ministry. I am often edified by the spirituality of many members of our parish. It is a beautiful thing to witness.



My name is Fr Jared Michael Dennis Loehr, LC, RN. This life is such a gift and there are so many ways to give that gift.

I remember CCD growing up at Ascension in the basement of St Thomas Aquinas High School and having mass in their auditorium. I remember helping with the choir and attending youth group in high school.

The place where I got to discover the most about myself and who God is was in adoration. I enjoyed those quiet moments when everything stops. I took out all the coincidences of life and started to see what God was revealing through all the highs and lows of life.

The people that I began to spend time with were ones who could support my endeavor for holiness and heaven. Relationships stopped being about fitting in but about exchanging what was within. A powerful moment was going up to the altar at a retreat and giving God a blank check of my life on the amount. Every moment since God has been cashing in on my yes and reinvesting himself to me especially in the Eucharist!

When students ask me why I wanted to be a priest, I surprise them by saying that it wasn't that I wanted to be a priest. I wanted to be totally happy, not kinda happy. I realized that was only possible by discovering God's plan for me. This was especially crucial since I will only be here on earth for a short amount of time. The religious life and priesthood was an invitation and can only be explained as a supernatural gift. I'm so grateful for His proposal and will try to be faithful to this great gift.

As far as my story goes, I went to Harmony middle school, then Blue Valley Northwest high school, then The University of Kansas for a bachelor degree in nursing. I mostly worked in the burn unit. Then I went to the Legionary of Christ Novitiate and College of Humanities in Cheshire, Connecticut for an associates degree in humanities. After that I received a degree in philosophy from Regina Apostolorum at the Thornwood, New York campus. My 3 year internship was in Houston, Texas, teaching, giving spiritual coaching, leading camps, boy's clubs, mission trips, and pilgrimages. My theology studies were in Rome, Italy. My first assignment was director of youth work in Houston and

now I'm being sent as chaplain of our school in Manila, Philippines!

Each day is a huge gift and I am so grateful for my wonderful family, faith, and being able to strive for sanctity. Please pray for me that I be a holy priest through whom others can receive God's grace. We are all made for heaven; let's help each other to get there!

Yours in Christ,  
Fr Jared Loehr, LC



The life of Christ is riddled with apparent contradictions -- not with "either-or" discrepancies that disprove the narrative, but with "both-and" realities that expand it. When we contemplate Christ, we often tend to gravitate toward familiarity rather than embracing wonder. Most of us are comfortable with the story of Christmas morning, but what about the days that followed? Join me in an imaginative journey, considering the mystery of the Epiphany.

## THE TWO QUESTIONS

We awoke on Christmas morning to the cries and coos of newborn Jesus. In the smell of fresh hay and the muck of livestock, travel weary parents nestled their infant Son. The humanity of the Holy Family, the familial warmth of the stable, and the sweet humility of the manger invited us to come without pretense.

The Nativity offered us entry, a shallow wading pool into the infinite depths of knowing Christ. We rested in the joy and quaint simplicity of Christmas morning, but as the days pass, we sense that we cannot stay here forever. We are not called to begin and end our spiritual journey with a Lord that we hold in our arms. Precisely at this moment, a band of strangers arrives.

Magi from the East are seeking, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage." Whatever ease or comfort we were experiencing is momentarily dashed. The Magi are utterly foreign to us. They are mystics and star readers; they are visionaries and dream interpreters; they are kings or ambassadors to kings. Their arrival in Bethlehem contradicts -- or radically expands -- the simplistic narrative we were writing.

They dare not hold Him, but rather prostrate themselves in homage to the infant Lord. The Magi's first question, "Where?" is answered, but a second question, "Who?" begins to bubble in our hearts. "Who are You, Jesus?" This second question can only be answered in contradictions: God-Man, Infant-Lord, Victim-Priest, Servant-King. Who are you, Lord?

## THE THREE WISE FOOLS

The Magi tell of their travels, of the star that preceded them, leading them here, to Him. As they gesture upward, we see the star dancing directly above us. It is astonishing; how did we not notice it before? The Light of the World is dispelling all darkness. Were our eyes shut too tightly to see? It takes strangers among us to see what we missed, to see what we should have seen all along.

The Magi are as otherworldly as the star they followed. We listen as they speak and wonder if their words are meant literally or allegorically. They weave poetry with science, mysticism with practicality and worldliness. Are they wisemen or fools to follow a star? Would we have traveled across kingdom and country, leaving the comforts of wealth, on the hope of a heavenly light? "The star preceded us," they reiterate. "We were never called beyond following."

"They are wise fools," we muse quietly. But we both secretly wish to be wise fools someday too.

Somewhere in the far-off distance, the hatred of Herod is growing. Does the apathy of nearby Bethlehem wound the heart of our infant Lord even more than the hatred of Herod? In the background, Bethlehem is overcrowded with travelers, busied with the census. The star shines bright for Bethlehem, but the people do not see it. Self-importance breeds apathy, and busyness makes the townspeople shortsighted. Perhaps Bethlehem would be better off if it possessed a bit of the wise men's foolishness.

# THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD (CONTINUED)

## THE FOUR GIFTS

Gold for a King, Frankincense for a God, and Myrrh for a Man; the extravagance seems outrageously out of place in the stable. Is this the King that the Magi imagined when they gathered gifts for His welcome? The star-seers do not appear to notice the dissonance between their grandeur and His poverty, between circumstance and reality.

We awkwardly look at one another, noticing our own empty pockets and hands. Did we honestly forget to bring gifts for our newborn Lord? Even if we had remembered, what could we possibly offer beyond the gifts of the Magi?

Suddenly the call becomes clear. In our poverty, we must give the only gift we possess: ourselves. Compared to the gifts of the Magi, the gift of our friendship seems insignificant. Then, we remember Christmas morning: the baby lying in the hay-lined manger, unbathed shepherds and sheep cluttering in to see Him, a young mother weary and worn. As we draw near to Christ in His humanity, we can also adore Him as our God and follow Him as our King.

The Lord who lays down His life, has also made Himself low enough to receive our gift of friendship. The three gifts of the Magi become four. Together we honor Him as Man, God, King, and Friend.

## THE ONE

Who is He whom Wisemen seek? Who is He whom shepherds and kings adore? The journey of knowing and loving Christ comes with many contradictions. These contradictions do not fracture or conflict, but ultimately unify, compliment, and expand.

The Baby lying in the Christmas manger also lays down His life on Good Friday's cross. The Man who fasts for 40 days in the desert also multiplies loaves of bread and turns barrels of water into wine. The Baby carried in His mother's arms also carries the entire world. He is true God and true Man, our One Lord, Jesus Christ. In every season, in every circumstance, He is the one that we seek.

## THE ALL

The Feast of the Epiphany (observed this year on January 3<sup>rd</sup>) celebrates Christ revealed to all. The Magi, who are typically depicted as 3 men by the Western Church or 12 men by the Eastern Church, represent the entire world. The Magi are Gentiles who seek and recognize Jesus, even when most of the Jewish people do not. The three gifts of the Wisemen are both prophetic and practical. Prophetically, they proclaim Jesus as King, God, and Man. Practically, some theologians theorize that the monetary value of the gifts may have helped finance the Holy Family's flight to Egypt (escaping Herodian massacre).

In this season of great division – physical division necessitated by the pandemic and growing socio-political division – the Feast of the Epiphany reminds us of our call to Christian unity. Together we seek Him, bringing our many diverse gifts to Jesus Christ, the one Lord of all.



# REMEMBERING FR. CHARLES

## CHILD OF BETHLEHEM

Jesus, Child of Bethlehem,  
Come within our hearts again.  
Restore our childlike spirit, Lord  
And touch the Child within.

Innocent Babe, perfect, pure,  
Inspire new penitence.  
Mercy and forgiveness bring,  
Restore our innocence.

Show us how much we are loved,  
Give peace, all fear destroy.  
Touch the child within us, Lord,  
Fill us with childlike joy.

Knowing that your love for us  
Is perfect, sent from above,  
Help us share with everyone,  
Your gifts of joy, of love.



## GOOD NEWS

"Good News, Good News!" the Angel said,  
The Savior lies in Bethlehem's bed.  
A manger where oxen usually are fed  
Holds food for the world, our spiritual bread.

The Good News is this: "God loves us so!"  
He sent his Son, even though  
His Son would die, before heaven's foe,  
So that we salvation would know.

The Good News proclaims: "Jesus is born!"  
The eternal Word in flesh adorned.  
He came as a babe to a world so forlorn,  
that our lives not be eternally mourned.

The Good News share: "Jesus is here!"  
Shout it out loud, let everyone here,  
As branches to vine, He is so near,  
United to us destroying all fear.

Monsignor McGlinn served many Kansas parishes throughout decades of the priesthood: Associate Pastor at St. Peter Cathedral in Kansas City, Kansas in 1967; Associate Pastor at Our Lady and St. Rose in Kansas City, Kansas in 1969; Pastor at Blessed Sacrament in Kansas City, Kansas in 1973; Parish Administrator at Sacred Heart in Leavenworth, Kansas in 1981; Pastor at Queen of the Holy Rosary in Overland Park in 1981. His next parish assignment would be his longest-tenured: In 1986, he became Pastor at Curé of Ars in Leawood, Kansas where he served for nearly 28 years until his retirement in July 2015. In May 2018, Monsignor returned to parish life as Senior Parochial Vicar in Residence at Church of the Ascension, Overland Park.

During his time at Cure of Ars, Monsignor began a tradition of saying, "I have a little prayer for you" at the end of his homilies. This was his way of announcing one of his "poem prayers" - writings that gained popularity through the years. For more than 25 years, he wrote and published an annual poem prayer booklet for Christmas and sent donation proceeds to Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos orphanage in Miacatlan, Mexico, which Cure of Ars parish supported. In November 2015, Monsignor published Poem Prayers, a book compilation of more than 200 of his favorite poems. The poems above are excerpts from this book.

Monsignor devoted a lifetime of service to God, living a powerful mission and bestowing the gift of faith to all he encountered. He also took any and every opportunity to grant others with his many pranks. His nieces and nephews loved to visit him at the Cure of Ars rectory and discover his many hand buzzers, finger snapping packs of gum, rubber chickens, or his favorite, a lighter that shocked whoever tried to ignite it. In addition to his role as all-star prankster, Monsignor was the beloved faith leader of the McGlinn family. He was adored by all, especially his nieces and nephews. Whenever Monsignor arrived at family events, everything stopped and eighteen McGlinn children would swarm him with love. This welcome party continued when the next generation of McGlinn children arrived and grew to know and love him.

Monsignor McGlinn entered his eternal, heavenly home on November 20, 2020 at the age of 78. He is missed and mourned by many.

# WINTER CLASSES BEGIN JANUARY 2021

## PRESENCE

*Presence: The Mystery of the Eucharist explores the truth and beauty of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, from its origins in Sacred Scripture, to its profound role in the life of the Church and her members. It is the crescendo of the entire story of salvation.*

**6 Week course**  
**Sundays 9:15AM—10:45AM**  
**Dates: January 10-February 21 (skip Feb. 14)**  
**St. Mark room**  
**Facilitated by Joyce Grashoff**  
**Cost of Materials: \$6.00**

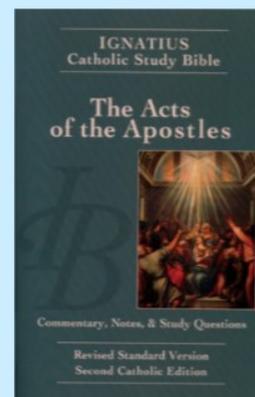


## ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

*From the Ascension of Jesus, the conversion of Paul, the first Church council, the gathering of the Gentiles to Paul's missionary journeys and subsequent imprisonment in Rome, we will study the entire Acts of the Apostles using Mark Hart's commentary on FORMED.org, The Acts Ignatius study guide and group discussion.*

**5 Week course**  
**Wednesdays 10:00AM-11:30AM**  
**Dates: January 13—February 10**  
**St. Mark room**  
**Facilitated by Kim Sutton**  
**Cost of Materials: \$11.00**

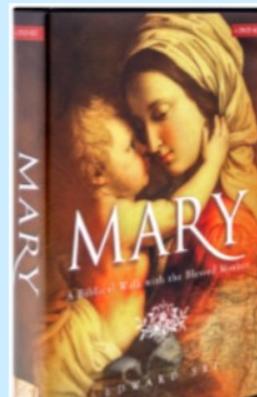
**5 Week course**  
**Wednesdays 5:30PM-6:45PM**  
**Dates: January 13—February 10**  
**St. Mark room**  
**Facilitated by Kim Sutton**  
**Cost of Materials: \$11.00**



## MARY: A BIBLICAL WALK WITH THE BLESSED MOTHER

*Filmed on location in the Holy Land, this Ascension Press study by Edward Sri will place you in the midst of the powerful drama of her earthly life, taking you through her joys ... and her sorrows. You will learn how she works in our lives today, drawing us ever closer to her divine Son. Seeing Mary in this way will change you forever. Mary will become a part of your daily life, and in your daily life, you will become more like Christ.*

**8 Week course**  
**Wednesdays 7:00PM-8:30PM**  
**Dates: January 13—March 3**  
**St. Mark room**  
**Facilitated by Katie Kuckelman**  
**Cost of Materials: \$25.00**



**Church of the Ascension—Adult Faith  
Registration Form for January 2021 Classes**

**REGISTER ONLINE at [www.kcascension.org](http://www.kcascension.org) OR**

**Turn in this Registration Form to the box in the Gathering Space or the Parish Office.**

Please make check payable to: Church of the Ascension. ONE check may be used for all courses.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

If couple attending class, Spouse: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

All are welcome to attend, but for our records, please indicate your parish:  Ascension  
 Other Parish

Would you like to use Zoom for this class? (optional)

Circle One:            \* ALWAYS            \* SOMETIMES            \* NEVER

Course Title	Day and Time	Cost of Materials	# Registering for the Class	# of Books to Order
Acts of the Apostles—AM	Wed. 10:00AM	\$11.00		
Acts of the Apostles—PM	Wed. 5:30PM	\$11.00		
Mary: A Biblical Walk with the Blessed Mother	Wed. 7:00PM	\$25.00		
Presence	Sun. 9:15AM	\$6.00		
			<b>Total Amount Due for Materials</b>	\$ _____

**REGISTRATION DUE DECEMBER 28, 2020**

Late registrations are welcome, but there is **no** guarantee that materials will be available your first day of class. There could be a \$10.00 late registration fee.

# MERRY *Christmas*

## A CHRISTMAS *Season* CALENDAR OF CELEBRATION

YOUR FAMILY HAS BEEN PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS THROUGH THE FOUR WEEK SEASON OF ADVENT. WHY LET CHRISTMAS END AFTER JUST ONE DAY? WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO CELEBRATE LIKE A CATHOLIC! OUR CHURCH CELEBRATES THE CHRISTMAS SEASON FROM CHRISTMAS EVE THROUGH THE FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD (CELEBRATED THE SECOND SUNDAY OF THE NEW YEAR). BELOW IS A CALENDAR OF THOUGHTS, DEVOTIONS, AND IDEAS TO KEEP THE PARTY GOING!

### DECEMBER 24TH

#### *Christmas Eve*

Do you ever feel overly anxious or busy during Christmas Eve and Day? Take a deep breath, reorient yourself toward Christ, and envision the first Christmas morning. There was no trimmed tree or decorated hearth; perfectly wrapped gifts could not be afforded. Hospitality simply meant welcoming shepherds. Consider which nonessential tasks you can forgo; give your family the gift of peace and your undistracted presence!

### DECEMBER 25TH

#### *Christmas Day*

Today we are invited to look back to the first Christmas, to Christ reigning in our hearts, and forward to the second coming of Christ. For many, this unique 2020 Christmas is marked with loss. Suffering reminds us that the Kingdom of God is not yet complete. Christ was, and is, and is yet to come. Christmas joy goes deeper than today's comfort or yesterday's memory; hope in Christ is the ultimate source of our joy.

### DECEMBER 26TH

#### *Feast of St. Stephen*

Have you ever wondered why we honor St. Stephen (the first or "proto"-martyr of our faith) on the day after Christmas? Why does the Church link martyrdom to Christ's birth? The answer is wrapped in the gifts under your tree! The tradition of gift-giving points us toward the one perfect gift: Christ. St. Stephen reminds us of the gift we offer in return: the imperfect (though beloved by God!) gift of our total self, offered in joyful trust.

### DECEMBER 27TH

#### *Feast of the Holy Family*

In our desire to honor the Holy family, we often gloss over their humanity. We forget that Mary and Joseph married amid "unplanned" pregnancy rumors; they were poor, gave birth in a stable, and lived as refugees; and they once lost their Son for three days. The Holy Family brimmed with love, but their life was not easy or polished! Celebrate your own family (imperfections and all!) with a fun family outing, movie night, or activity.

### DECEMBER 28TH

#### *Feast of the Holy Innocents*

Today we remember the little children massacred by Herod (Mt. 2: 1-18). We remember that we were once little too. God often reveals Himself in small ways (and through "small," humble people!). We consider the mystery of Christmas, of God incarnate as a baby. "He could have approached us through beauty and power and strength, but He has chosen to come to us through littleness and humility" (Caryll Houselander).

### DECEMBER 29TH

As you adjust your internal calendar to embrace the full Christmas season, you will discover "after Christmas" sales happening during Christmas! If you are a parent or grandparent, this is an excellent time to pick up gingerbread house kits or other Christmas crafts/sweets on sale. There are many creative ways to connect secular Christmas traditions to Jesus, but also remember that positive family fun is also a great way to honor Christ and share His love.

### DECEMBER 30TH

Speaking of Christmas sales (see Dec. 29th), consider buying extra strands of Christmas lights. Children may enjoy choosing and hanging Christmas lights in their bedrooms, a playroom, or a secret fort. Connect the new Christmas lights to the theme of Christ as the light of the world. What happens when one light is turned on in a dark room? Does darkness ever overpower light? How does light "feel" compared to darkness? Reread the Gospel from Christmas Day (Jn. 1:1-18).

### DECEMBER 31ST

Perhaps you are more than ready for 2020 to end — what a year! Likely you can easily list losses and complaints from the year, but challenge yourself to closeout 2020 with gratitude. Together with your family, create a "Top 20 for 2020" list and post it in your home. What are the top 20 ways that you have been blessed during this difficult year? Try to include a few "silver lining" blessings (graces received due to a loss). Thank God in prayer. Read James 1:17.

### JANUARY 1ST

#### *Solemnity of Mary Mother of God*

Today's New Year greetings are actually one month late! The Church's New Year actually began with Advent; it began with Mary, with Jesus gestating within her womb. Today's New Year also begins with Mary, celebrated as the Mother of God. No matter the calendar, Mary is honored on the first day because Jesus was first made incarnate through her. Mary always leads us to Jesus; has she lead you to receive Jesus at Mass today?

### JANUARY 2ND

#### *Memorial of Sts. Basil & Gregory*

“A tree is known by its fruit; a man by his deeds. A good deed is never lost; he who sows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love” (St. Basil). Consider making a “family sized” New Year’s resolution. Collaborate with your family members to set a shared resolution that promotes familial growth in authentic friendship, kindness, and love. Choose a resolution that is doable/attainable and (at least somewhat) fun!

### JANUARY 3RD

#### *The Epiphany of our Lord (Observed)*

Following a rare astrological anomaly, Wise Men journeyed, seeking a foretold King. The star did not shine upon earthly grandeur, but merely upon a baby, born to peasant parents who were not in possession of power or prestige. How did the Wise Men recognize the One whom they sought? How do we? Gold for a King; Frankincense for a God; Myrrh for a Man. What can we offer our newly born Lord? Only our love, given to a friend.

### JANUARY 4TH

#### *Memorial of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton*

Have you experienced dissonance with your friends/family during the past year due to physical distancing rules or socio-political division? St. Elizabeth Ann Seton wrote, “The accidents of life separate us from our dearest friends, but let us not despair ... the more we are united to [God] by love, the nearer we are to [others].” Extend Christmas grace to those from whom you have grown distant; let Christ be the bridge.

### JANUARY 5TH

#### *Memorial of St. John Neumann*

“Everyone who breathes, high and low, educated and ignorant, young and old, man and woman, has a mission, has a work. We are not sent into this world for nothing. ... God sees every one of us; He creates every soul for a purpose. He needs ... every one of us. He has an end for each of us; we are all equal in His sight. ... As Christ has His work, we too have ours; as He rejoiced to do His work, we must rejoice.” -St. John Neumann

### JANUARY 6TH

Giftwrap your favorite puzzle and set it out for your family to discover. Yes, you can giftwrap items that you already own! Work on the puzzle in spurts, over time, with different family members. Use the puzzle time as conversation time, catching up with each family member about whatever is important to them. Consider the interdependent nature of families and of our Church. Each member contributes their unique “self” to the whole, like puzzle pieces.

### JANUARY 7TH

The theme of Jesus as the Word of God is emphasized during Christmas (Jn. 1:1). Have you ever wondered why? Read Gen. 1 and Jn. 1:1-18, and then consider the two main parts of Mass — the Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist. Discuss this theme with your family, and introduce a Christmas Haiku contest. (A Haiku is a simple poem that follows a 5/7/5 syllable pattern). Why are our words important? How do our words relate to The Word?

### JANUARY 8TH

If your family’s Christmas season spirit has been waning, then look for fun ways to reiterate that Christmas is NOT over. Institute an ugly Christmas sweater day. Play Christmas music in your home. Turn on all of your outdoor Christmas lights (you still have those up, right?!) Invest some time or money in an extra activity that the whole family will enjoy (outdoor ice skating, a creative movie night, a special dinner out or in, or bundle up for an evening around a backyard fire pit).

### JANUARY 9TH

If you typically rush through holiday baking, making all of your favorite treats *before* Christmas day, then you may want to rethink your baking schedule! Why rush through recipes for a single day when the full Christmas season allows time to enjoy the process? Today, bake holiday treats with your family. Notice the warmth of the stove and the sweet smell in the air. Enjoy the process and the result! Draw ties to the warmth of Christ’s love and the sweetness of His presence!

### JANUARY 10TH

#### *The Baptism of our Lord*

Celebrate Jesus’ Baptism by recognizing your own! Find the Baptismal dates of your family members and note them on your personal calendar. If you cannot find original certificates, contact the church where the Baptism occurred and inquire. Determine a simple way to celebrate Baptismal anniversaries going forward. Reflect: what happens during Baptism? Why was Jesus Baptized? How was His Baptism different from mine?

YOUR PARTICULAR CHRISTMAS SEASON CELEBRATION SHOULD BE AS UNIQUE AS YOUR FAMILY! THIS CALENDAR IS ONLY A STARTING POINT; FEEL FREE TO CUSTOMIZE, DELETE, AND INSERT YOUR OWN IDEAS. WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO CHOOSE CHRISTMAS SEASON TRADITIONS THAT FIT YOUR PERSONAL/FAMILIAL INTERESTS, CULTURE, AND CHARISMS. IF YOU ARE A PARENT, BE CAREFUL NOT TO FILL YOUR CALENDAR WITH ACTIVITIES THAT OVER-REQUIRE YOUR ENERGY. CHRISTMAS SHOULD BE ENJOYABLE AND RESTFUL FOR EVERYONE, PARENTS INCLUDED! HERE ARE A FEW FINAL IDEAS FOR CELEBRATING THE SEASON:

- **DÉCOR UP:** KEEP YOUR CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS AND LIGHTS UP (AND ON!) UNTIL JANUARY 10TH.
- **SACRED AND SECULAR:** KEEP CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS BY CONNECTING FAMILY ACTIVITIES TO FAITH. ALSO REMEMBER THAT YOU DO NOT HAVE TO “OVER SPIRITUALIZE” FAMILY FUN. SPENDING QUALITY/POSITIVE TIME WITH LOVED ONES HONORS CHRIST!
- **PARTY ON:** CONSIDER PLANNING CHRISTMAS PARTIES DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON RATHER THAN PRIOR TO CHRISTMAS DAY.
- **SLOW YOUR STATUES:** RATHER THAN SETTING UP YOUR ENTIRE NATIVITY SCENE DURING ADVENT, ADD ONLY ONE STATUE A DAY, LEADING UP TO CHRIST PLACED IN THE MANGER ON CHRISTMAS MORNING. LET THE WISE MEN “JOURNEY” TOWARD JESUS BY MOVING THEM A LITTLE CLOSER TO JESUS EACH DAY, UNTIL THEY ARRIVE ON THE FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY (JANUARY 3RD).