

## Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we gather in the warmth and joy of the Christmas season, I want to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude for each of you. Your faith, hospitality, support, and encouragement have made 2024 an extraordinary year for our parish.

Together, we have celebrated the beauty of our shared faith, welcomed new faces into our congregation, and served our community with compassion and generosity. From inspiring liturgies to uplifting fellowship events, your dedication to living out the Gospel has truly reflected Christ's love in action.

As we look toward 2025, I am filled with anticipation and hope for the blessings that lie ahead. With God's grace, we will continue to grow, offering a spiritual home to those seeking deeper connection with Christ. We look forward to expanding our service to the community, providing even more opportunities to make a meaningful impact.

In the coming year, we plan to host enriching events that will strengthen our bond as a parish family and inspire others to

join us in worship and mission. Together, we will strive to deepen our faith, embrace the call to discipleship, and glorify God in all that we do.



During this holy season of Christmas, let us remember the profound gift of Christ's birth—the light that shines in the darkness and the hope that renews our hearts. May the peace and joy of the Christ Child fill your homes and hearts as we celebrate His coming.

Thank you for being a vital part of our parish community. Your love and commitment make this a place of faith, hope, and joy. I am blessed to serve alongside you, and I look forward to an amazing 2025, guided by the Holy Spirit and united in our mission.

Wishing you and your loved ones a blessed and merry Christmas and a New Year filled with His abundant blessings!

In His service,

*Father Jim*

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Dear Parishioners,

I hope you all had a great Christmas full of wonderful gifts and even better company. An update on the church rectory, Foundation Systems of Michigan has completed its project in the basement. We are now waiting for the City of Sterling Heights to sign off on the final permit.

Thank you to everyone who came out to our pierogi-making dates in November, we had a great turnout. We were able to make over 200 dozen and turned a very nice profit. We have another pierogi-making session scheduled for March, just in time for Easter! Stay tuned for more details.

The parish committee approved the purchase of a new snow blower and salt spreader to help cut down snow removal costs, which were very high last year. We have also employed a service dedicated to snow removal in the parking lot as needed.

On a personal note, thank you to everyone who reached out with your thoughts and prayers to my family after the loss of my father, John Kotelnicki. Your support means the world to us, and I know my mother in particular appreciates all the support from her church family. Hope you all have a great New Year's Eve and an even better New Year to come.

**-Jeff Kotelnicki**

## Veterans Honored



Each year on November 11, the United States honors its military veterans with various commemorative events, with a prominent ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery where the president traditionally lays a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. This Veterans Day, All Saints parish paid tribute to those who have served the United States with a heartfelt procession, recognizing veterans in our community, including

Bill, Marcia, and Dwight.

The observance continued with the solemn reading of the names of deceased veterans from All Saints parish prior to Holy Mass. Mike led this reading, honoring members of our community who served in the Navy, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, and Air Force. This commemoration offered a meaningful spiritual experience, as parishioners reflected on the lives and sacrifices of these individuals, bringing forth cherished memories and deep gratitude for their service.



## Deceased Veterans from All Saints

Teofil Szydowski

Roger Kohut

Michael Smart

Frank Kozlowski

Louis Markiewicz

William Ziemczyk

Walter Sobiechowski

Russell Filips

Albert Filipowicz

Henry Kielbowicz

Chester Szydowski

Edward Tuzek

Wanda Kielbowicz

Bernice Karson

Walter Tamulewicz

Marion Jezierski

Frank Stahurski

Peter Kozlowski

Edward Lesko

Peter Chlubitski

Walter Worek

Robert Wawrzyniak

Michael Springer

Edward Kohut

Anthony Jezierski



## Youth Movie Night November



Laughter  
Kool-Aid Cake  
Andrea Michael Mary  
Fun Pizza ELF Olivia  
Jacob 2024 chairs  
games Prayer Cups  
All Saints Nardeen  
pingpong  
November



We remember our dear brother, **John A. Kotelnicki**, who is now home with his Lord and Savior. Please keep his family in your prayers.

Beloved husband of Patricia, devoted father of Mary Beth, Jeff (Jennifer), Jill (John), and the late Jacqueline, and proud grandfather of eight and great-grandfather of one. Treasured brother of Helen, and the late Joe and Ed.

Born in 1933 in Twin Rocks, Pennsylvania, John was an athlete and skilled pitcher. After a brief time as a coal miner, he enlisted in the Army, serving with the 27th Infantry in Hawaii. In 1960, he married Patricia and settled in Michigan, working 32 years at Ford Motor Company.

A devoted family person and parishioner of All Saints, John loved gardening, hunting, fishing, and cheering on his grandchildren. His love for family and faith was boundless, and he will be deeply missed.



The tradition of blessing homes during Epiphany is a beautiful and meaningful practice that reflects faith, gratitude, and hope for the year ahead. One of the most recognizable customs is chalking the initials of the Three Wise Men—Caspar (Kaspar), Melchior, and Balthasar—above the main entrance of the home. These initials can also be interpreted as the Latin phrase *Christus Mansionem Benedicat*, meaning "May Christ bless this house." This act symbolizes inviting Christ's presence into the home and seeking His protection for its inhabitants.



Epiphany, often blessed by clergy and distributed to parishioners on the eve of Epiphany, holds spiritual significance. By inscribing "K+M+B" (in Polish tradition) or "C+M+B" (in Latin tradition), families express their hope for Christ's blessing and the safeguarding of their home from evil throughout the year. This ritual also serves as a reminder of the Magi's journey and their recognition of Christ as King.

In my own tradition, the Epiphany home blessing is a special and sacred occasion. I prepare a white cloth on a table, placing a crucifix and a candle—often my First Holy Communion candle—on it, creating a small altar. This simple yet reverent setting invites a sense of holiness and reflection as the priest blesses the home.

Growing up, I had the privilege of accompanying Father Seniors, Banas and Mushalko on their Epiphany visits as an altar server. At each home, Frankie Bomba and I would sing a duet, adding a personal touch to the blessing ritual. Sometimes we would remain in the same room for the entirety of the visit, offering prayers and blessings from a central space. Other times, the family would request a room-by-room blessing, and we would move throughout the house, sprinkling holy water and offering prayers for each individual space. This practice emphasized the desire for God's presence and protection in every corner of the home.

These visits were both spiritually fulfilling and personally exciting. I was thrilled to sing and contribute to the blessings, and I was always eager to receive small cash gifts in appreciation for my efforts. Yet, more than the financial rewards, these moments fostered a deep connection to my faith and a sense of joy in bringing blessings to others.

The practice of blessing homes on Epiphany serves as a powerful reminder of the enduring presence of Christ in our lives. Whether through the symbolism of the chalk, the prayers of a priest, or the simple yet heartfelt preparations of a family, this tradition underscores the importance of inviting God's grace into our homes and hearts. It is a cherished ritual that transforms an ordinary house into a sacred space, where faith and love are renewed year after year. **CONTACT FATHER JIM TO ARRANGE A TIME THAT WORKS FOR YOU!**

## 🎉 Coming When We are Ready: The Ultimate Online Auction! 🎉

Get ready for an exciting online auction featuring **over 125 unique items** up for grabs! Preview the items for 7 to 10 days, and then let the bidding wars begin, with the auction open for another 7 to 10 days. This event is open to everyone—parishioners, members of the PNCC and PNA, and the public! Taking place 2025!!!! See Father Jim for questions and details.

**How Can You Help?** Donate items valued at \$25 or more! Whether it's new or gently used, vintage or modern, your contribution can make a big difference. Here's what we're looking for:

- 💰 **Silver Dollars:** A collector's dream.
- 🏠 **Vacation Stays:** Offer a stay at your condo or a weekend getaway package.
- 📱 **Electronics:** Gadgets like smartphones, tablets, and smartwatches.
- 🎁 **Auction Baskets:** Curated collections of themed goodies.
- 🎫 **Gift Cards & Event Tickets:** For the foodies, adventurers, and entertainment lovers.
- 🎨 **Customized Items:** Personalized gifts like engraved jewelry or custom portraits.
- 🏆 **Autographed Memorabilia:** Signed items from celebrities, authors, or sports stars.
- 🛒 **Themed Baskets:** "Gourmet Food Basket" or a "Tech Bundle."
- 🧰 **Service Packages:** A year of house cleaning, landscaping, or car detailing.
- 🍽️ **Local Business Vouchers:** Support local businesses with restaurant or boutique vouchers.
- 🌱 **Hobby-Related Prizes:** Gardening tools, crafting supplies, and more.

**Please Note:** Alcohol cannot be auctioned. Guns and ammunition are acceptable.

**Logistics:** Items can be picked up in Cleveland, Detroit, or we can arrange shipping for most items.

Don't miss out on this chance to contribute and score some amazing finds! Get your donations ready, and let's make this auction unforgettable! ☀️



***NYMES LLC/Rust Belt Revival Online Auction  
teams up with Dr. P.'s Estate Liquidators with  
100% of proceeds going to***

***All Saints Parish!!!!***



## Mark Your Calendars for 2025 Youth Gathering

### Diocesan Youth Gathering

The diocesan Youth Association recently met and announced some important details about the 2025 Youth Gathering. The theme is "God's Kingdom Builders" and will take place July 21-24, 2025 at the Walnut Ridge retreat center in Morgantown, Indiana. The cost will be just \$150 per participant for registration fees received by May 31. The fee includes all meals, lodging, camp activities and all Fun! The fee for registrations submitted after that date will be \$200. We ask all youth and interested adult counselors to mark your calendars and begin making arrangements to attend! It is never too early to have fund raisers to help cover costs.

The Youth Association will meet online on Wednesday January 15 at 7pm (eastern) / 6pm (central) to plan this exciting event, and all interested youth and adults are welcome to participate in this and following planning meetings. Please contact Deacon Doug Scott, chaplain at [dscott8938@gmail.com](mailto:dscott8938@gmail.com) if you have any questions, or Fr Sr Charles at [smparmail@gmail.com](mailto:smparmail@gmail.com) to receive a Zoom link.

## Additional Church and Affiliate Websites:

*Polish National Catholic Church [www.pncc.org](http://www.pncc.org)*

*Western Diocese PNCC [www.westerndiocese.org](http://www.westerndiocese.org)*

*National United Choirs <https://nucmusicscholarship.weebly.com/>*

*Polish National Alliance [www.pna-znp.org](http://www.pna-znp.org)*

*Spojnia Credit Union (SCU) [www.spojniacreditunion.org](http://www.spojniacreditunion.org)*

*Additional Church and Affiliate Facebook Information:*

*Polish National Catholic Church Western Diocese PNCC*

*National Youth Convocations (Convo '22) National United Choirs*

*PNA Council 306-PNU / PNA District 19 National United YMSofR*

## The Gift of Prayer and Service

Sarah has lovingly created and donated **50 rosaries** to bring spiritual comfort and support to our sister parish, **St. Mary's in Parma, Ohio**. St. Mary's, part of our Seniorate, not only nurtures souls through faith but also serves the community through their **weekly food ministry**, which provides meals to approximately **120 individuals** each week.





These rosaries serve as a tangible reminder of God's love and the power of prayer, offering hope and peace to those who need it most. Sarah's thoughtful contribution reflects the essence of Christ's teachings—**serving others with compassion and generosity**.

Let us keep St. Mary's parish, their ministry, and all those they serve in our prayers, as we continue to unite in faith and love.



## Prepping the Altars for Christmas



**Mary and Joseph  
and the Three Wise  
Men!!!**



## Calendar January/February

- Solemnity of the Holy Family  
January 5<sup>th</sup>
- Solemnity Epiphany of our Lord  
January 6<sup>th</sup>
- Epiphany Visits 1/6/25 through  
2/15/25.
- Solemnity of the Baptism of our Lord  
January 12<sup>th</sup>
- Youth Night, January 18<sup>th</sup>
- January 31<sup>st</sup> Litany and Testimony of  
the All Saints
- Scout Sunday February 2<sup>nd</sup>
- Septuagesima Sunday February 16<sup>th</sup>
- Sexagesima Sunday February 23<sup>rd</sup>
- February 28<sup>th</sup> Exposition of the  
Blessed Sacrament and Testimony of  
All Saints
- Ash Wednesday March 5<sup>th</sup>

***Personalized Custom Pierogi cutter sales starting soon!!!!!!***



### January Birthdays

16 Daria Markiewicz  
18 Shane Carr  
19 Sarah Szydlowski  
21 Dwight Berend  
  
21 Sharon Stachurski  
22 Frank Stachurski +  
29 Sophie Szydlowski

### February Birthdays

1 Jill Carr  
27 Larry Bawol

***Happiest of birthdays and  
anniversaries as we celebrate you!!***

### February Anniversaries

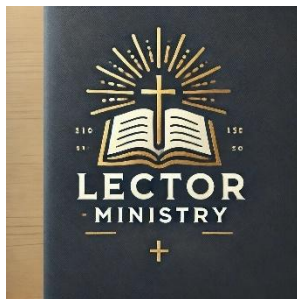
4 Mary Chebaa/ Raced Kena  
16 Gloria/Larry Bawol  
20 Pat/John Kotelnicki +



## Home Alone 2024: Preparing for Jesus



The 2024 Youth Christmas Play, directed by Gloria and starring the talented All Saints Youth, brought a unique twist to the holiday season by blending scripture with the beloved movie *Home Alone*. Through laughter and heartfelt moments, the play revisited the iconic antics of the "bandits" and the imaginative pranks, while highlighting the deeper challenges of loneliness. It beautifully tied these themes to the true essence of Christmas—finding joy in the Christ Child, cherishing family, church, friends, and serving those in need. This creative retelling inspired all to reflect on togetherness and faith during this sacred time of year.



### Announcement: Calling All Lectors!

**I**

Do you feel called to proclaim the Word of God? Our parish is seeking dedicated individuals to serve as lectors during Mass. Lectors play a vital role in bringing Scripture to life, helping to inspire and guide our congregation. If you are interested in sharing your voice and faith in this meaningful ministry, we encourage you to reach out. Training will be provided to ensure you feel confident and prepared.

Please contact Father Jim for more information or to sign up. Together, let us share the Word of the Lord!

## Christmas Word Search

J O S E P H M L W F A C M V X G C J L E  
 B E P T O F E A K B M H F A V A V R O W  
 V O U E X I Y Y S O G Q Y L N D B U W V  
 Q W D T R S O I M S X Z C D H A C Y I P  
 L A M B Y I V P K C K H L T H Q G F N T  
 V S A R B A T K P V A E Y R O L G E G P  
 Q G A R A R E D N O W T O L Q O E J R S  
 T M T Q B M E R R Y S F T Y Z W S C A T  
 S G W I Y B Z L O T P N F L W P L M D S  
 G C R H P F D S A O N P F M E B T R H I  
 B N V Y T G P R F A L N N A L S E U P R  
 Z H I P E R L C Q C C A N A I H A D E H  
 P S Y S T U A F M Y T G T R P J K E Q C  
 Z F U S S S K E Y H E Q H E Y Y R L V W  
 W L H E Q E E N B L D C H S G C E B J D  
 E C A E P U L H S X B S J U G L T M Q C  
 C C Y J V L D B G B L E S S E D S U K A  
 W X B Z I F I Z J I V S O E S V A H X T  
 S T G L R J X H W F H K N J E J P I O Y  
 B I B Z Z C D I W J P G M Z G C I V X X

HUMBLE,  
 SHEPHERD,  
 LAMB,  
 CATTLE,  
 LOWING,  
 ANGELS,  
 GLORY,  
 HIGHEST,  
 CHRIST,

MARY,  
 JOSEPH,  
 MANAGER,  
 BABY,  
 STAR,  
 WONDER,  
 BLESSING,  
 PASTERKA,  
 CHRISTMAS,

MERRY,  
 MASS,  
 HAY,  
 CANDLE,  
 PEACE,  
 EARTH,  
 JESUS,  
 GABRIEL,  
 BLESSED,

## The Best Humble Shepherd's Pie Recipe

### Meat Filling (Nadzienie Mięsne):

- 2 tablespoons olive oil (oliwa)
- 1 cup chopped yellow onion (cebula)
- 1 lb. 90% lean ground beef (wołowina mielona) or ground lamb (jagnięcina mielona)
- 2 teaspoons dried parsley leaves (pietruszka)
- 1 teaspoon dried rosemary leaves (rozmaryn)
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme leaves (tymianek)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt (sól)
- frozen corn kernels (kukurydza)
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper (pieprz)
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce (sos Worcestershire)
- 2 garlic cloves (czosnek), minced
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour (mąka)
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste (koncentrat pomidorowy)
- 1 cup beef broth (bulion wołowy)
- 1 cup frozen mixed peas and carrots (groszek i marchewka)
- 1/2 cup

### Potato Topping (Puree Ziemniaczane):

- 1 1/2 - 2 lb. potatoes (ziemniaki), peeled and cubed
- 8 tablespoons butter (masło)
- 1/3 cup half-and-half (śmietanka)
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese (ser parmezan)



### Instructions

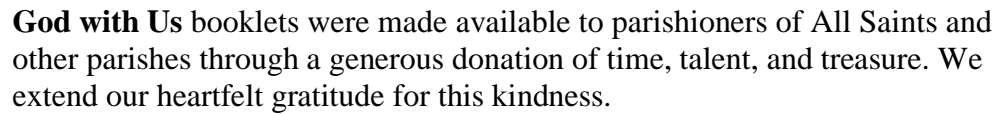
1. Heat oil in a skillet. Sauté onion for 5 minutes.
2. Add meat and spices. Cook 6-8 minutes until browned.
3. Stir in Worcestershire sauce and garlic. Cook for 1 minute.
4. Add flour and tomato paste, then broth and vegetables. Simmer for 5 minutes.
5. Boil potatoes until fork tender. Drain and mash with butter, half-and-half, garlic powder, and Parmesan.
6. Spread meat in a baking dish. Top with potatoes.
7. Bake at 400°F for 25-30 minutes. Cool 15 minutes before serving.

*Smacznego! (Enjoy!)*

Surprised to see an empty seat at the Super Bowl stadium, a diehard fan remarked about it to a woman sitting nearby. "It was my husband's," the woman explained, "But he died." "I'm very sorry," said the man. Then he continued. "Yet, I'm really surprised that another relative, or friend, didn't jump at the chance to take the seat reserved for him." "Beats me," said the football widow. "They all insisted on going to his funeral."

*A true Lion Fan Just Joking!*





This season heralds hope, and the Scripture selections, reflections, and prayers in **God with Us** encourage us on our Advent journey, reassuring us we are not alone. God stands at our side—and on our side—now and always.



## 2024 A.N.S ALTAR SOCIETY ANNUAL ADVENT TEA

On Saturday, December. 14, 2024, the Altar Society held their annual advent tea in the parish hall. All the tables were decorated with beautiful Christmas china upon red tablecloths top with white lace toppers and Christmas lantern centerpieces of red, white, and black with flickering flames. All the ladies received adorable handmade Christmas Tree favors filled with chocolate kisses, which were lovingly made by Co-chair Carol Szydowski.

The afternoon began with the introduction of the A.N.S. officers, hostesses and Fr. Jim Ploskonka. The ladies were also invited to pick an ornament or two from a basket of red and gold glass bulbs along with a blank white tag with which the ladies were invited to write Christmas wishes, intentions or prayers for family and friends and hang them upon a lighted Christmas tree. Later in the afternoon, Fr. Jim gave a blessing for all the intentions on the tree and for all those present at the tea.

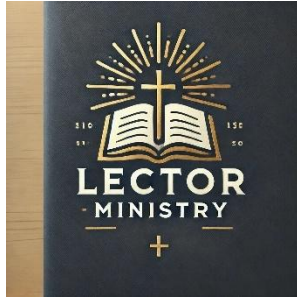
This year's tea was an "Afternoon Tea," which began in the 1800's when Anna, the 7<sup>th</sup> Duchess of Bedford, who was a close friend of Queen Victoria and prominent in English society, complained of "having that "sinking feeling" during the late afternoon. She proceeded to request an array of light foods served to her and Queen Victoria; thus, the "afternoon tea" became tradition among the ladies of the aristocracy ... Our tea, therefore, began with the serving of homemade craisin scones along with lemon curd, clotted cream, and flavored teas. The second course was a charcuterie tray filled with small slices of ham, turkey, salami, assorted cheeses, vegetables, and crackers along with a tray of assorted fruits. Lastly, the ladies were treated to a sweets tray containing assorted mini eclairs, cream puffs, candies, and nuts. It was an "Afternoon Tea" enjoyed by everyone and "fit for a Queen" ...

A short break was taken during the tea during which Fr. Jim gave a beautiful, presentation on the Gospel of Luke, focusing on compassion, mercy, faith, love, and repentance. All the guests left in good spirits and ready to move forward with their preparations for family and friends and the upcoming Christmas holidays. Merry Christmas – *Wesołych Świąt Bożego Narodzenia*

***Sharon Stachurski, A.N.S. President***







## **Announcement: Calling All Lectors!**

**II**

Do you feel called to proclaim the Word of God? Our parish is seeking dedicated individuals to serve as lectors during Mass. Lectors play a vital role in bringing Scripture to life, helping to inspire and guide our congregation. If you are interested in sharing your voice and faith in this meaningful ministry, we encourage you to reach out. Training will be provided to ensure you feel confident and prepared.

Please contact Father Jim for more information or to sign up. Together, let us share the Word of the Lord!

### ***Updates from the Friends of Sunday School (FoSS)***



Dear friends,

As another year draws to a close, I wanted to reflect on special moments we shared as a community. These events would not have been possible without the incredible support and dedication of so many people, and I am deeply grateful for each of you.

Our Movie Night on November 15th was a resounding success! The children and their families enjoyed a magical evening watching "Elf" thanks to Larry's generous contribution of the equipment. His efforts transformed our space into a cozy, cinema-like setting, creating memories we will all cherish. Larry, your kindness, and generosity made all the difference. Thank you!

Then, on December 8th, we bowled our way into the holiday season! Our Bowling outing with Holly Cross was a fantastic opportunity to bond as one big, happy family. The joy and laughter were infectious, and I am so thankful to everyone who helped organize and participate in this fun-filled event.

Finally, our visit to Mrs. Sophi's senior home on December 23rd was a truly heartwarming experience. Witnessing the children's genuine compassion and care as they delivered Christmas gifts to the residents, especially Mrs. Sophi, was deeply moving. Even if children did not know Mrs. Sophi personally, their kindness shone through, demonstrating the beautiful spirit of generosity that embodies our community.

None of these wonderful events would have been possible without the tireless efforts of our beloved teacher, Gloria. Gloria, you are the heart and soul of our church, and your dedication is truly inspirational. Thank you for your unwavering support and commitment.

Wishing you all a joyous holiday season and a happy New Year. Warmly and thank you!

*Mary Chebaa*

## **Announcement: Election of Parish Officers (December 15, 2025)**

We are pleased to announce the results of our parish officer elections. Congratulations to all those elected and volunteering to serve. Please keep these individuals and our parish committee in your prayers and consider offering your own time and talents as part of this team. These have been submitted to Father Senior Charles Zawistowski, Diocesan Administrator for review and approval.

### **Officers:**

- President: Jeff Kotelnicki
- Vice President: Dwight Berend
- Treasurer: Jennifer Kotelnicki
- Financial Secretary: Carol Szydlowski
- Recording Secretary: Sharon Stachurski

### **Directors:**

- Marcia Berend
- Donald Wechselberger
- Pat Rabaut Konrad

### **Auditors:**

- William Konra
- Michael Szydlowski
- Marianne Markiewicz

### **Tribunal:**

- Pat Kotelnicki
- Rody Yezman

Thank you to everyone who participated in the election process, and to those who continue to guide and support our parish family.

*Midnight and Christmas Day Masses filled the church with faithful parishioners and guests, song, the Holy Spirit, love, and the Spirit of Christmas. Thank you all.*





### ***A reminder from our financial secretary – Envelopes are here!***



*We at All Saints are looking forward to a wonderful 2025. The new envelopes are in the hall and ready to be picked up. Some parishioners choose not to use the envelopes and donate directly through their bank. Others prefer to have a box of weekly envelopes. Either way works for us. I have prepared envelopes for those who have used them in the past. If you do not have a box assigned but would like to have one, just catch me after mass and I will be happy to give you a box. This year I have added information to the parish dues envelope. There has been some confusion in the past about how this envelope works. To be a member in good standing, with voting rights, and the eligibility to hold an office, the yearly dues need to be paid. The amount of the yearly dues is \$ 150.00 per person. Out of that amount \$100.00 goes to the general church, \$25.00 goes to the Western Diocese and \$ 25.00 stays in our parish.*

*We have seen significant changes in our parish in the past year and as a committee we are foreseeing even better things in the future. All Saints is a wonderful parish and the things we do with a small number of dedicated members are amazing. If you have time, talent or resources and would like to see even better things for All Saints please talk to Fr. Jim or any parish committee member. We can plug you into an area that will benefit both you and our church. I am looking forward to seeing all the good things God has in store for us as a parish in 2025.*

*Happy New Year*

*Carol Szydlowski*

*Financial Secretary*

### **An Update and Greetings from our Youth Group**

Hi everyone! I wanted to start this update off with a big thank you again to everybody who helped us during our Operation Christmas Child project. I know we finished this project a month ago but with the holidays in full swing, it is a reminder of how many children were helped during this season of joy and, unfortunately, hardships. Looking forward to the new year, the youth group will be going through some changes. I will be leaving for college next August and would like to make sure our group is in good hands before I leave. I am not sure who will be taking my place but one of our youths will do a fantastic job. We will be holding a vote at the next youth group night, and I strongly encourage all youth to attend, cast a vote, and even throw your hat into the ring! But even though I will be leaving that does not mean our annual Operation Christmas Child drive will end. I plan to start collections again in February and have a new leader under training by then. We as a group hope to introduce many new collections and fundraisers in this upcoming year of new and exciting changes. I know I speak for the whole youth group when I say we are very excited for these new changes and new ideas. I hope everyone had a wonderful Christmas and wish you all a happy and prosperous new year!

-Olivia Kotelnicki

***“You Are Not Far from The Kingdom of God.”***

**Sermon: The Central Message of Love**

Today’s Scripture readings beautifully capture the fundamental principle of all religions: **to love God and others**. These readings remind us that we are created to love God through our love for others and to love others as a true expression of our love for God.



**Love is a Verb:** It’s not just an emotion; it’s a commitment to action. Jesus’ teachings through His words and deeds illustrate this concept perfectly. Our love for God and our love for others is inseparable. When we love God, we love all His creation, including every person. Even in the face of suffering and injustice, love endures. Through this enduring love, we can become agents of hope and healing in a broken world.

**A Path to Life and Blessing:** In our first reading, Moses addresses the Israelites, reminding them of the importance of obeying God’s Law. This Law is not just a set of rules; it’s a path to dignity, purpose, and honor. Moses teaches that by following God’s commandments, we receive blessings: longevity, prosperity, and a life marked by peace and fruitfulness. The Law of God is a guide, a path to a deeper relationship with Him, and to a life lived in harmony with others.

**Trusting in God’s Strength:** In today’s psalm, David reminds us of God’s strength and protection. By recognizing God as our fortress, our rock, and our shield, we are led to deeper trust and love for Him.

- **Gratitude:** Recognizing God’s strength in our lives inspires gratitude, prompting us to express our thanks through prayer, praise, and acts of service.
- **Courage and Hope:** When we trust in God’s strength, we can face life’s challenges with courage and hope, knowing that He is always with us.

**The Gospel: The Greatest Commandments:** In today’s Gospel, Jesus is approached by a scribe who asks, “What is the most important commandment in the Law?” Jesus gives a profound and concise answer, summarizing the entire Law with two commandments: **Love God and love your neighbor**.

Jesus first quotes the **Shema**, a central prayer in Jewish worship that begins, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is Lord alone.” This prayer calls for total devotion to God: to love Him with all your heart, soul, and strength. This is the foundation of our faith—a life centered on the love of God.

But Jesus doesn’t stop there. He adds a second commandment from Leviticus: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” This commandment broadens the scope of love from a personal relationship with God to relationships with others. Jesus links love of God with love of neighbor,

showing that true faith cannot exist in isolation but must be lived out through acts of love, empathy, and compassion toward others.

**A Dual Command for Love:** Jesus' dual command of loving God and neighbor offers a comprehensive vision of faith. The vertical relationship with God must be reflected in our horizontal relationships with others. These two dimensions of love are inseparable.

- **Love for God:** Our love for God is expressed through obedience, worship, and devotion.
- **Love for Neighbor:** Love for others is manifested through kindness, empathy, and genuine concern for their well-being.

By placing these two commandments together, Jesus shows that the authenticity of our love for God is demonstrated through acts of compassion and justice. Faith is not measured only by religious rituals or piety, but by our capacity to love and serve others.

**Love Your Neighbor as Yourself:** Jesus calls us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. This command challenges us to recognize the dignity and worth of every person, seeing them as God sees them. It also implies a radical commitment to the welfare of others, just as we care for our own needs.

In today's world, where divisions based on race, religion, and social status are so prevalent, Jesus' command to love our neighbor is more relevant than ever. He calls us to overcome prejudice, to see beyond differences, and to build a community based on mutual respect and love.

**Practical Tips for Living Out Love:** While the command to love may seem simple, it requires constant effort and intentionality. Here are some practical ways we can live out this commandment in our daily lives:

- **Practice Mindfulness:** Be present in the moment and aware of your thoughts and feelings. Cultivate gratitude for the blessings in your life.
- **Develop Empathy:** Strive to understand the perspectives of others. Listen actively, seeking to understand before being understood.
- **Cultivate Compassion:** Perform small acts of kindness. Volunteer your time to help others or donate to charitable causes.
- **Set Boundaries:** Caring for yourself is essential. Learn to say no when necessary so you can continue helping others without burning out.
- **Seek Support:** Connect with others who share your values. Seek professional help if you're struggling with emotional exhaustion or burnout.

By practicing these principles, we can grow in love and compassion, fulfilling Jesus' command to love both God and neighbor.

**Love as the Path to the Kingdom:** The readings today remind us that love is the foundation of our faith. It is the central command that binds us to God and to each other. When we love others, we are not far from the Kingdom of God. Let us commit ourselves to living out this love in practical ways, knowing that through love, we reflect God's grace and bring healing to the world.

As we leave today, let us carry with us the message that love is not just a feeling but a commitment to action. May our love for God be reflected in our love for others, and may this love guide us toward the Kingdom of God. Amen.



*SERMON: Ordinary 32 B*

**“She Has Contributed All She Had.”**

**Title: True Devotion and Sacrificial Love: Lessons from the Widow’s Offering**



**Abstract:** Today’s Scripture readings urge us to surrender our lives fully to God, serving others with humble and generous hearts. The widow’s offering, described in both the first reading and the Gospel, stands as a profound testament to sacrificial love and trust in divine providence. This article explores the themes of selflessness, humility, and devotion found in today’s passages and calls on the faithful to embrace a life of sincere worship, compassionate service, and wholehearted giving.

**Introduction:** Today's readings call us to go beyond outward displays of faith and embrace the true spirit of devotion: humble, sacrificial love that mirrors Christ's own example. Through the stories of the widows in the Book of Kings and the Gospel of Mark, we witness acts of selfless giving that challenge us to examine our motives, prioritize compassion, and seek to serve others with sincere hearts.

**I. The Widow’s Sacrificial Love in the Book of Kings:** The first reading recounts the story of a poor widow who shares her last bit of food with the prophet Elijah, despite her own desperate situation. This act of generosity is not merely a gesture but a profound expression of faith in God’s providence. Like Mary, the mother of Jesus, who would later submit her life to God's redemptive plan, the widow’s selflessness foreshadows the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

This widow’s offering is a powerful reminder of the kind of sacrificial love God values. Her act of giving, even from her own scarcity, reflects a deep trust in God. In her willingness to share what little she had, she participates in the redemptive work of God, reminding us that no act of faith, however small, is ever insignificant in God’s eyes.

**II. The Psalm’s Call to Compassion and Justice:** Responsorial Psalm 146 beautifully echoes this theme of divine compassion, celebrating God’s unwavering commitment to justice and care for the vulnerable. The psalm praises God as the protector of the oppressed, the provider for the hungry, and the defender of widows and orphans. Through these verses, we are reminded that God’s love extends particularly to those society often overlooks or marginalizes.

This Psalm invites us to reflect on our own commitment to justice. Are we, like the widow, willing to share our blessings and extend our resources to support those in need? In a world often



driven by self-interest, Psalm 146 encourages us to cultivate lives marked by compassion, generosity, and trust in God's enduring love.

**III. St. James on Spiritual Wisdom vs. Earthly Wisdom:** The second reading offers a contrast between spiritual wisdom, which leads to peace and righteousness, and earthly wisdom, which breeds jealousy and selfish ambition. St. James's teaching resonates with the lessons found in today's Gospel, where Jesus critiques the religious elite for their hypocrisy, pride, and exploitation of the vulnerable.

St. James's words remind us that true wisdom comes from above. This wisdom calls us to humility and selflessness, inspiring a life that bears "good, righteous fruit." In the Gospel, we see how Jesus applies this wisdom by praising the humble act of the widow, who, unlike the religious elite, places her entire trust in God. This simple act embodies the wisdom of a heart dedicated to serving God over self.

**IV. The Gospel of Mark: A Critique of Hypocrisy and a Lesson in True Devotion:** In today's Gospel, Jesus contrasts the prideful actions of the scribes with the humble offering of a poor widow. Jesus condemns the scribes for exploiting their positions, manipulating religious obligations to enrich themselves at the expense of widows and other vulnerable members of society. While outwardly appearing devout, these scribes engage in self-serving practices that distort the essence of true faith.

Against this backdrop, Jesus highlights the poor widow who, despite her poverty, gives all she has. Her gift, though small in monetary value, holds immense spiritual significance. According to Jewish tradition, the Temple had 13 collection boxes, where people gave their offerings. The widow's gift of two leptons—a meager sum equivalent to mere pennies—stands out to Jesus as a profound act of devotion because it represents her complete reliance on God.

Some modern scholars interpret Jesus' response not merely as praise for the widow's faith but as a critique of a religious system that exploits the vulnerable. Yet, regardless of this perspective, the widow's act remains a powerful example of wholehearted devotion. Her offering exemplifies the kind of faith and sacrifice that Jesus values, contrasting sharply with the scribes' empty displays of piety.

**V. Honoring the Widows and Vulnerable Among Us:** The widows within our own parish communities continue to embody this spirit of faith and resilience. Despite personal losses, financial struggles, and sometimes isolation, many remain active and committed members of our spiritual family. Their prayers, their participation in worship, and their acts of service—such as visiting the sick and supporting the community—make them invaluable stewards of the faith.

As a Church, we are called to recognize, support, and cherish these members of our community. Like the widow in today's Gospel, they serve as silent witnesses to the power of faith and the value of humility. We should not only encourage and pray for them but also learn from their example of trust in God's providence.

**VI. Our Own Call to Generosity and Self-Giving:** Jesus challenges us to see others not by their wealth, status, or influence but by their hearts. The widow's act reminds us that God values not the amount we give but the love and trust behind our offering. True greatness in God's Kingdom is not found in material wealth but in the selfless giving of our lives, our love, and our resources.

Let us ask ourselves: are we prepared to pour ourselves out for others, as the widow did? Can we look beyond the superficial standards of society and give our hearts fully to God's work? Jesus calls us to this deeper commitment, to give with compassion, courage, and a spirit of selfless love.

**Conclusion:** Today's readings inspire us to embrace a life of humility, generosity, and true devotion. By following the example of the widows in Scripture, we can deepen our relationship with God and become vessels of His love for others. May we approach the altar today with hearts open to God's call, willing to surrender ourselves in service to those in need, as a testament to our faith.

As we reflect on the widow's offering, let us remember that greatness in God's eyes is found in a heart wholly given to Him. Inspired by her example, may we pray for the strength and courage to offer our own lives—our time, our talents, and our treasures—as humble, sacrificial gifts in service to God and His people. In this way, we answer Jesus' call to “give all we have” and discover the true joy and freedom of a life lived for others.



*SERMON: Ordinary 33 B*

**“My Words Will Not Pass Away.”**

As the liturgical year draws to a close, the Church's readings direct our attention to eschatological themes, prompting introspection about our spiritual journey and alignment with eternal truths.

The passage from Daniel 12:1-3 describes a time of unparalleled distress, yet it also offers hope through the promise of deliverance and resurrection for the faithful. This duality serves as a call to live wisely and lead others toward righteousness, embodying the light of God's truth in a world often overshadowed by self-interest. It challenges us to assess whether our lives reflect divine wisdom and whether we are guiding others toward God through our actions and choices.

In Hebrews 10:11-14, 18, the finality of Jesus' sacrifice is emphasized. Unlike the repetitive offerings of old, Christ's single, all-encompassing sacrifice sanctifies believers, eliminating the need for further atonement. This profound act of love and redemption invites us to live in gratitude, honoring His sacrifice by embodying the holiness and love He demonstrated. It



reassures us that forgiveness is a gift already bestowed, encouraging us to live lives that reflect this divine grace.

The Gospel readings depict signs of tribulation and cosmic upheaval, yet Jesus assures us that His words will never pass away. This promise offers a steadfast foundation amidst life's uncertainties, reminding us of the unchanging nature of God's love and truth. In a world rife with turmoil, this assurance encourages us to maintain hope and trust in God's eternal promises, even when faced with challenges.

Throughout salvation history, God has consistently extended mercy, desiring all to come into a relationship with Him. From sparing Noah's family to delivering the Israelites and ultimately sending Jesus, God's actions underscore His commitment to our salvation. However, this divine mercy calls for our genuine repentance—a heartfelt turning away from sin and toward God. It's a reminder that while God's grace is boundless, it invites a sincere response from us, not mere lip service.

The transition from the liturgical year to Advent is an opportune moment for spiritual renewal. It's a time to evaluate whether our lives honor Jesus' sacrifice and whether we are serving as beacons of light, guiding others toward God. The concept of final judgment, while sobering, serves as an invitation to live lives marked by wisdom, love, and a commitment to leading others to God. Embracing God's mercy should inspire transformation, motivating us to align our lives more closely with His will.

The year's end naturally invites reflection, offering a chance to assess our spiritual growth and areas for improvement. It's an opportunity to renew our dedication to God and to those around us, recognizing that our earthly journey is a precursor to eternal communion with God. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection provide a model for us to follow, offering strength and guidance even in challenging times. By supporting one another and relying on God's grace, we can embark on a renewed journey of faith, striving to be lights in the world and leading others toward the path of divine love and truth.

May this season serve as a profound reminder of God's unwavering presence and love, inspiring us to live lives of faith, hope, and love as we journey toward Him



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### *Sermon: Solemnity of Christ the King*

#### *“Do You Say This on Your Own?”*

#### **The Feast of Christ the King: Living as Citizens of His Eternal Kingdom**

The Feast of Christ the King reminds Christians of Christ's eternal reign and their call to live as faithful citizens of His Kingdom. This article examines the



theological significance of Christ's kingship, its biblical foundations, and its practical implications for contemporary Christian living. Using the parable of Martin the Cobbler as an illustrative lens, the paper emphasizes the themes of service, love, and surrender that define life in Christ's Kingdom.

As the liturgical year draws to a close, the Feast of Christ the King invites the faithful to reflect on the sovereignty of Jesus Christ over all creation. The story of Martin the Cobbler offers a poignant example of recognizing Christ in the marginalized, encapsulating the call to humble service as an expression of life in His Kingdom.

Christ's kingship encompasses several profound aspects of His identity and mission:

1. **Creator:** As the second Person of the Trinity, Christ holds supreme authority over all creation, as affirmed in John 1:3: "Through Him all things were made."
2. **Redeemer:** Christ's sacrificial death purchased salvation for humanity, highlighting His role as the ultimate Redeemer (1 Peter 1:18-19).
3. **Head of the Church:** Christ leads His Church with unparalleled primacy and care, described in Colossians 1:18 as "the head of the body, the Church."
4. **Ruler of Nations:** God has granted Christ dominion over all nations, fulfilling the prophecy in Psalm 2:8: "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage."

These dimensions of Christ's kingship invite the faithful to understand their allegiance not to worldly powers but to the divine King who reigns with justice, mercy, and love.

The kingship of Christ is deeply rooted in Sacred Scripture, providing a foundation for its theological understanding:

1. **Old Testament Foundations:** Messianic prophecies, particularly in Daniel 7:13-14 and Isaiah 9:6-7, portray the coming Messiah as a king whose reign will bring justice and peace.
2. **New Testament Fulfillment:** The Gospels affirm Christ's kingship from the Annunciation, where Gabriel declares to Mary, "His kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1:33), to the crucifixion, where Jesus is proclaimed King by the inscription on the Cross (John 19:19). The eschatological vision in Matthew 25:31-46 reveals Christ's ultimate judgment as King.

The proclamation in the Nicene Creed at the First Council of Constantinople (381)—"His kingdom will have no end"—solidifies the Church's teaching on the eternal reign of Christ, transcending time and space.

Christ's kingship diverges radically from the worldly conception of monarchy. His throne is the Cross, His law is the Beatitudes, and His mission is to liberate humanity from sin and lead all to eternal life. Unlike earthly rulers, Christ's kingship is marked by humility, service, and sacrificial love. This paradoxical kingship is illustrated in His statement, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), emphasizing the spiritual and eternal nature of His reign.



To honor Christ as King requires more than intellectual assent; it demands a transformation of life. The faithful are called to embody the principles of His reign through specific actions:

1. **Surrender to Christ:** Allow Christ to reign fully over every aspect of life—body, mind, heart, and will. This surrender reflects the prayer, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done.”
2. **Serve Others:** Recognize Christ in the poor, sick, and marginalized, imitating His humble service. As Jesus taught, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40).
3. **Love Like Christ:** Fulfill Christ’s new commandment to love others as He loves us—with unconditional, sacrificial, and self-giving love (John 13:34).

The story of Martin the Cobbler exemplifies these principles, demonstrating how Christ’s presence is often revealed in unexpected encounters with those in need.

The Feast of Christ the King is a call to live lives marked by service, love, and unwavering faith. In a world increasingly marked by division and self-centeredness, the reign of Christ offers a countercultural vision of unity, humility, and sacrificial love. By living as faithful citizens of His Kingdom, Christians proclaim not only His kingship but also the transformative power of His eternal reign.

As we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King, we are reminded of His unique and eternal reign. His kingship, rooted in Scripture and affirmed by the Church, calls believers to a life of surrender, service, and love. By reflecting on the biblical foundations of Christ’s kingship and committing to live as faithful citizens of His Kingdom, we align ourselves with the eternal truths of the Gospel, proclaiming with confidence that Christ is indeed King of kings and Lord of lords.



## Remarks on the Gospel of Luke

### *Afternoon Advent Tea*

**All Saints Parish, Reverend Dr. Jim Ploskonka**

*December 15, 2024*



### **Introduction**

Good afternoon! This gathering is a beautiful opportunity for fellowship and reflection on the Gospel of Luke, often called the “Gospel of Compassion.” Luke’s message highlights Jesus’ gentleness, God’s faithfulness, and the call to live as inclusive, prayerful disciples, making it especially meaningful for women.

**1. Jesus’ Gentleness:** Jesus’ gentle nature is evident in Luke’s account of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38–42). While acknowledging Martha’s busyness, He invites her to prioritize spiritual nourishment, reflecting His understanding of our burdens as women.

**Reflection Question:** How can you embrace Jesus' gentleness in your life and share it with others?

**2. God's Faithfulness:** Luke emphasizes God's unwavering faithfulness, as seen in the Annunciation to Mary (Luke 1:26–38) and the fulfillment of Simeon's and Anna's hope (Luke 2:25–38). This serves as a reminder that God keeps His promises, guiding us through challenges.

**Reflection Question:** Can you recall a time when you experienced God's faithfulness in your life?

**3. The Need for Prayer and Repentance:** Luke portrays Jesus' dedication to prayer (Luke 5:16) and calls to repentance, such as in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32). These practices invite transformation through the Holy Spirit.

**Reflection Question:** How can you make prayer a more integral part of your daily life?

**4. The Inclusivity of Salvation:** The Gospel of Luke proclaims that salvation is available to all, as illustrated in the stories of the Samaritan leper (Luke 17:11–19) and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10). This inclusivity challenges us to extend God's grace to everyone.

**Reflection Question:** How can you reflect God's inclusive love in your interactions with others?

**5. The Sermon on the Plain:** Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17–49) emphasize compassion, forgiveness, and mercy, calling us to radical love and selflessness.

**Reflection Question:** How can you practice compassion and mercy in your daily life?

**6. Luke as a Physician and Disciple:** Luke's background as a physician and disciple enriches his Gospel with themes of healing and care for the marginalized, inspiring us to use our talents for God's kingdom.

**Reflection Question:** What gifts has God given you that you can use to serve His kingdom?

**Closing Thoughts:** The Gospel of Luke invites us to embrace Jesus' gentleness, trust God's faithfulness, prioritize prayer and repentance, and live as compassionate disciples. Like Mary and Elizabeth, may we respond to God with courage and faith, sharing His love with the world.

### **Closing Prayer**

*Gracious God, thank You for the lessons in the Gospel of Luke. Help us to pray, live with compassion, and share Your love. Bless our fellowship and guide us as we serve You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

Thank you for allowing me to join you today. May God bless you abundantly as we grow in faith and love. Enjoy the rest of your tea!

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## *SERMON: Advent 1 C*

***“Be Vigilant at All Times and Pray!”***

### **Advent - A Journey of Hope, Prayer, and Regeneration**

Advent marks the start of a new liturgical year, a season filled with hopeful anticipation. It calls us to prepare our hearts for Christ’s return while embracing His presence in prayer, Sacraments, and everyday moments. The longing of the Jewish people for their Messiah reminds us to remain open to the many ways Jesus reaches us now.



Today's readings remind us of fleeting worldly securities, but Christ’s promise shines as a beacon of hope. Amid cosmic signs and life's challenges, we are assured of the Savior's return. His invitation is clear: stand tall, trust in Him, and lift our gaze from burdens to embrace His redeeming love.

### **Actions of Love and Vigilance**

Jesus calls us to:

1. **Stand Tall:** Like the bent-over woman in Luke’s Gospel, He invites us to rise above life's struggles and focus on Him, offering our minds, hearts, and lives.
2. **Stay Vigilant:** Reflecting on Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the Magi, we are inspired by their readiness. Unlike Herod or the distracted innkeepers, let us stay watchful, recognizing His presence in prayer and the faces of those around us.
3. **Pray:** Prayer strengthens us to endure trials and stand firm in faith. Just as the disciples struggled in Gethsemane, we are reminded of the necessity of constant prayer to stay spiritually awake.
4. **Guard Our Hearts:** Jesus warns against distractions that dull our spiritual senses. Instead, we are called to lift our hearts to Him, setting aside worldly burdens to live fully in His grace.

### **Regeneration Through Resolution**

Advent offers an opportunity for renewal, as G.K. Chesterton noted, “The object of a New Year is not that we should have a new year. It is that we should have a new soul.” This season is our chance to deepen prayer, embrace the Eucharist, and make heartfelt confessions.

Advent is a gift that redirects us to God’s immense love and invites us to respond with faith. Let this be a year filled with deeper prayer, stronger faith, and growing love. Together, let us stand tall, awaken our hearts, and joyfully prepare the way for the Lord.

*Closing Thought:* “Be vigilant at all times and pray!” Let this become our guiding mantra as we journey through Advent.



*“Prepare Ye the Way of The Lord.”*

**Advent: Preparing Our Hearts for Christ**



The Second Sunday of Advent calls us to prepare a “royal highway” in our hearts for Jesus, making space for Him to be reborn within us this Christmas. This preparation extends beyond celebrating His Nativity to welcoming Christ’s daily presence in our lives. We encounter Him:

- **In the Eucharist**, His real presence nourishes and transforms us.
- **In Scripture**, His Word guides and strengthens our faith.
- **In others**, as His image invites us to love and serve with compassion.
- **In community**, uniting in worship and fellowship as His body.

Advent also reminds us to prepare for Christ’s ultimate coming, whether at the end of our lives or the world. By living in faith, hope, and love, we ready ourselves for His presence now and in eternity.

The first reading from Baruch reflects God’s preparation of a way home for the Babylonian exiles, symbolizing spiritual restoration. Baruch portrays “Lady Jerusalem” as a grieving mother who dons the garments of justice and glory, a vivid image of redemption.

Advent echoes this theme, inviting us to leave behind spiritual captivity—sin, selfishness, and materialism—and clothe ourselves with mercy, kindness, and justice. Like the exiles, we are called to walk a path of renewal, allowing God to transform sorrow into joy. As we journey toward Christ’s birth, we open our hearts to His redeeming presence.

Today’s Responsorial Psalm captures the exiles’ joy as they return to Jerusalem, singing songs of gratitude. It reminds us that God is the restorer of fortunes and the source of our deepest joy. Advent invites us to journey back to God, trusting in His promise to turn our tears into rejoicing.

In the second reading, St. Paul encourages the Philippians to await Christ’s return with joy and hope, confident in God’s continued work within them. His prayer calls us to deepen our love and live with integrity, preparing for Christ’s Second Coming.

Paul’s words challenge us to grow in faith and allow God’s grace to transform us. Advent is a season of trust and hope, where we anticipate the fulfillment of God’s promises in Christ.

In the Gospel, John the Baptist urges repentance and renewal, calling us to “prepare the way of the Lord.” This involves removing obstacles that hinder our relationship with God—pride, sin, and injustice—and committing to a renewed life.



Advent is a sacred time to clear spiritual paths for Christ, aligning our hearts with God's love. John's message remains relevant, challenging us to examine our lives and embrace interior transformation.

The Sacrament of Penance, often called a "second baptism," mirrors the cleansing symbolized in John's baptism of repentance. Advent, like Lent, is a time for self-examination and repentance. Penance invites us to turn away from sin and be restored to grace, preparing our hearts for Christ's coming.

This holy season calls us to confront our sins, seek forgiveness, and extend that forgiveness to others. By doing so, we remove the barriers that hinder our relationship with God and our neighbors, creating a straight path for Christ to enter our lives.

## **Practical Steps for Spiritual Renewal**

As we prepare for Christmas, we are called to self-examination and transformation:

- **Fill the valleys:** Strengthen your prayer life and deepen your faith, addressing areas of spiritual neglect.
- **Straighten the paths:** Abandon sinful habits, embrace integrity, and reconcile with those you've wronged.
- **Clear the debris:** Let go of grudges, hatred, and unresolved conflicts.
- **Level the mountains:** Overcome pride and selfishness by practicing humility and serving others.

Next week, our parish will host penitential services for reflection and renewal, with opportunities for private confession. This sacrament offers a profound moment of healing, where we leave behind the weight of sin and emerge renewed in God's grace.

John the Baptist's message reminds us of the need for repentance and forgiveness. Jesus teaches us in Matthew 6:14-15:

"For if you forgive men their transgressions, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions."

Advent is the time to reconcile with God and others, allowing His forgiveness to flow through us. By letting go of grudges and seeking peace, we prepare our hearts for Christ's arrival.

Advent is a journey of grace, offering the opportunity for transformation and renewal. Through prayer, reconciliation, and acts of love, we prepare our hearts as a dwelling place for Christ.

As we approach Christmas, may we embrace this sacred season, welcoming Christ with open hearts. Let His peace, joy, and grace fill our lives as we prepare to celebrate His birth and anticipate His glorious return.

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*SERMON: Advent 3 C*

**“What should we do?”**

### **A Call to Rejoice and Prepare**

The Third Sunday of Advent, known as *Gaudete Sunday*, invites Christians to rejoice as we reach the midpoint of our Advent journey toward the celebration of Christ’s birth. The term “Gaudete” comes from the Latin word for “Rejoice!” and is a profound call to embrace joy and hope as we prepare our hearts for the fullness of God’s promise.



This joy is deeply rooted in three central truths:

1. **Celebration of Christ’s historical birth in Bethlehem.**
2. **Recognition of Christ’s daily presence in our lives.**
3. **Anticipation of Christ’s glorious return at the end of time.**

The rose-colored candle on the Advent wreath and the rose vestments of the clergy symbolizes this joy, marking a moment of light and hope amid the reflective solemnity of Advent. Yet, this joy is not merely circumstantial; it is a manifestation of faith, hope, and trust in God’s presence and promises.

The scriptural readings center on joy born out of hope and divine fidelity.

The first reading, from the Book of Zephaniah, proclaims: “*Shout for joy, O Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel!*” These words of exultation are striking, considering the historical backdrop of despair and exile. Zephaniah’s prophecy, delivered during the Jewish exile around 600 BCE, speaks of God’s unwavering presence and promises redemption, even amid suffering.

This juxtaposition of joy and adversity serves as a timeless reminder: even in moments of darkness, God remains faithful. The prophet calls us to rejoice not because all is well, but because God’s light pierces the shadows of despair, promising hope and salvation.

The Responsorial Psalm echoes this theme with Isaiah’s declaration: “*Shout with exultation, O city of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.*” Isaiah’s words highlight the abiding presence of God as the source of strength, comfort, and joy for His people.

The second reading, from Philippians, amplifies this theme of joy, as Paul writes: “*Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again, rejoice!*” These words, penned while Paul was imprisoned,

reflect an enduring joy rooted not in circumstances but in the unchanging love and promise of God.

Paul's exhortation challenges us to cultivate a joy that transcends the fleeting emotions tied to worldly events. This joy arises from trust in God's presence and an abiding hope in His plan for our lives.

In the Gospel reading, John the Baptist delivers a passionate message, urging his audience to prepare for the Messiah's arrival through repentance and transformation.

When asked, "*What should we do?*" John provides concrete answers:

- Share with those in need.
- Act with integrity and fairness.
- Reflect genuine repentance through just and compassionate behavior.

John's call to repentance is not limited to regret for past wrongs; it is a call to active, visible change—a realignment of one's life to God's will. This transformation involves both inward renewal and outward action, demonstrating faith through deeds.

John's message resonates today as a call to embody Christ's teachings in our daily lives. Our faith is not simply an intellectual or emotional exercise; it must manifest in how we treat others, especially the marginalized and vulnerable.

This Gospel challenges us to ask:

- Are we living as beacons of God's love, justice, and compassion?
- Do our actions reflect the transformative power of faith?

John's instructions are simple yet profound. By sharing our blessings, practicing fairness, and extending kindness, we make Christ visible in the world, becoming agents of joy and hope for others.

## **Preparing the Way for Christ**

Just as John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus, we are called to do the same in our own contexts. Parents, teachers, and public servants hold unique responsibilities in this mission:

- **Parents:** Instill faith and values in their children, leading by example.
- **Teachers:** Shape young minds and hearts with virtue and truth.
- **Public Servants:** Promote justice, fairness, and the common good, reflecting God's love in their service.

## **Practical Ways to Prepare**

- **Reconciliation:** Heal broken relationships and foster harmony in our families and communities.
- **Justice and Fairness:** Ensure honesty and equity in our professional and personal interactions.
- **Generosity:** Share our time, talents, and resources with those in need.

By living these values, we not only prepare our hearts for Christ's coming but also help others encounter His love and guidance.

Gaudete Sunday reminds us that our rejoicing is not confined to the past or distant future; it is an invitation to experience God's presence and promises today. The joy we celebrate flows from a profound trust in God's goodness, a readiness to align our lives with His will, and a commitment to bring His light to the world.

As we light the rose candle and hear the call to rejoice, let us embrace this joy with hearts open to transformation. May our lives reflect the hope and love of Christ, bringing light and peace to a world yearning for the good news of salvation.

In the spirit of *Gaudete Sunday*, let us rejoice always, confident in God's faithfulness and the promise of His Kingdom.




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*SERMON: Advent 4 C*

**“Blessed Are You Among Women!”**

**The Annunciation and Mary's Yes: A Model of Faith and Obedience**



Today, we reflect on one of the most profound moments in salvation history: the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel revealed to Mary that she would bear the Son of God. This encounter is not only a cornerstone of the Christian story but also a model for our response to God's call. As we delve into this mystery, consider a challenging question: If you were Mary, how would you have responded? Would you embrace the mission Gabriel set before her, or, like Jonah, resist and attempt to avoid the task?

Mary's response is an extraordinary testament to her faith, humility, and willingness to trust in God. She could have said no; the choice was hers. God does not force His will upon us but invites us into partnership in His divine plan. Mary's "Yes" demonstrates a profound trust in the mystery of God's work, even as she, like any of us, had questions and uncertainties.

Mary was a young woman, likely in her early teens, living in the modest village of Nazareth. Betrothed but not yet married, her life was simple and unremarkable by worldly standards. Yet, God chose her to bear His Son, highlighting His preference for the humble and lowly. This choice speaks volumes about God's nature and His kingdom, which elevates those often overlooked by the world.



Her initial response to Gabriel was one of wonder and curiosity: “*How can this be, since I am a virgin?*” Mary’s question was not born of doubt but of a desire to understand. Like Isaiah, who said, “*Here am I, send me,*” Mary felt unworthy of such a call. Yet, her ultimate response— “*Let it be with me according to your word*”—reveals her willingness to trust in God, even without fully comprehending the magnitude of her role.

Following Gabriel’s announcement, Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, who was also experiencing a miraculous pregnancy. This meeting is one of the most beautiful and affirming moments in Scripture. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, immediately recognized Mary’s unique role in God’s plan, proclaiming: “*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!*”

This encounter highlights the power of true hospitality. Elizabeth’s words were more than a warm welcome; they were an affirmation of Mary’s life and mission. This blessing stayed with Mary throughout her life, providing strength in moments of joy and sorrow—from the shepherds’ visit at Jesus’ birth to standing at the foot of the cross, and ultimately to the joy of the resurrection.

In response to Elizabeth’s affirmation, Mary sings the *Magnificat*, a hymn of praise and justice that reveals the heart of God’s kingdom.

- “*He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.*”
- “*He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.*”
- “*He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.*”

The *Magnificat* is not just personal praise; it is a proclamation of a radical vision for the world. Mary’s song bridges the promises of the Old Testament with the hope of the New, affirming that God’s salvation is both spiritual and social. Through her, the Word becomes fresh, inaugurating a kingdom that overturns structures of oppression and lifts the downtrodden.

The relationship between Mary and Elizabeth illustrates the beauty of collaboration in God’s work. Each had a unique role—Mary as the mother of Jesus, Elizabeth as the mother of John the Baptist—and together they prepared the way for the Messiah.

John would go on to fulfill his prophetic calling, pointing others to Jesus as the Lamb of God. Mary, as the Theotokos (God-bearer), nurtured and taught Jesus, shaping His human understanding of faith, justice, and compassion. Their intertwined stories remind us that God’s plans often involve community and mutual support.

While the Catholic and Orthodox traditions have long honored Mary, Protestants have sometimes hesitated to give her due recognition. Yet, the early Church affirmed her title as *Theotokos*, emphasizing her vital role in the Incarnation. Through Mary, God entered the world, partnering with humanity in the work of redemption.

Her example invites us to consider our own response to God’s call. Like Mary, we may feel unworthy or inadequate for the tasks set before us. But her story reminds us that God does not

call the qualified; He qualifies the called. Her humility and courage show that when we say “Yes” to God, He works through us in ways beyond our imagining.

The *Magnificat* challenges us to embody its message in our lives. Mary’s vision of God’s kingdom—a world where the lowly are lifted and the hungry are filled—calls us to action. How can we, like Mary, magnify the Lord and proclaim His greatness?

- **By serving the poor and marginalized.**
- **By working for justice and equity.**
- **By living lives of humility and gratitude.**

This Advent season, as we prepare for the celebration of Christ’s birth, let us reflect on Mary’s faith and obedience. Her response to God’s call— “*Here am I, the servant of the Lord*”—is a model for our own discipleship.

Like Mary, we are called to participate in God’s work of salvation and reconciliation. This begins with humility, trust, and a willingness to say “Yes” to God, even when we feel unprepared. It continues with concrete actions that reflect God’s love and justice in the world.

As we ponder the Annunciation and Mary’s *Magnificat*, let us embrace her vision of God’s kingdom. May her words inspire us to live as faithful disciples, magnifying the Lord with our lives and proclaiming His greatness in all we do. **May we, like Mary, say “Yes” to God’s call and carry His light into the world.** †

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### *SERMON: Christmas Midnight Mass*

#### **“Don’t be afraid!”**

“Do not be afraid! For behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy. It will be for all the people.”

Fear. It’s something we’ve all felt—whether it’s fear of the unknown, the weight of life’s struggles, or the threats we see in the world around us. Fear can paralyze us, make us withdraw, or cause us to lash out. It can even distance us from one another and from God.

Fear drives much of the brokenness we see today—violence in schools and churches, families torn apart by unforgiveness, and people burdened by anxiety. Yet, into this fear comes a message of hope: “*Do not be afraid.*”

When angels appear in Scripture, these are often their first words. Joseph heard them when he was uncertain about taking Mary as his wife, and the shepherds heard them in the fields when the angels appeared in the night sky: “*Do not be afraid. Today, in the city of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ and Lord.*”



This message is for us, too. Whatever fears or struggles we carry; God invites us to trust Him. Something wonderful has happened that changes everything.

Christmas reminds us that God is not distant or indifferent. In Jesus, God becomes one of us, entering the darkness of our world to bring light and hope.

Some of us may be carrying our own darkness tonight—families facing financial struggles, someone mourning a loss, or others wrestling with addiction, loneliness, or doubt. If this is you, hear this: Christmas is for you. Christ was born for you. He came to bring light into your darkness.

The baby in the manger will one day lay down His life to conquer sin and death. Tonight, that same light shines anew, calling us to trust, to hope, and to believe.

In Jesus, we see God made flesh—not as a king in splendor, but as a vulnerable child in a manger. God is present in the small, the weak, and the broken. He is with the poor, the hungry, the lonely, and the forgotten.

Our faith calls us to go where there is need and brokenness, for it is there we encounter God. If we focus only on success or power, we risk missing Him entirely.

Today, everything changes. The Son of God is born, and we are no longer alone. The Virgin Mary offers us her Son as the light to guide our way. Let us not hesitate or remain in fear. Like the shepherds, let us go to Bethlehem with joy to meet our Savior.

Do not be afraid to encounter Him anew this Christmas. Let the Child who is God lead you to light, mercy, and everlasting love.

**Christ is born! Let us rejoice and share this good news. †**

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### ***SERMON: Christmas Daytime Mass***

#### **Based on The Nativity Sermon of St John Chrysostom.**

Today, something truly incredible has happened—something that changes everything.

The sounds of celebration fill the air. It is not just the joyful song of a shepherd; it is a heavenly symphony. Angels are singing, Archangels are harmonizing, and all of heaven is rejoicing together. Why? Because God has done something amazing: He has come down to earth to be with us, and in doing so, He lifts us toward heaven. The One who created everything has stepped into His own creation, not as a mighty ruler, but as a tiny, vulnerable baby.



Think about that for a moment. The King of Kings, the Lord of all, did not arrive with flashes of power or armies of angels. He came quietly, humbly, born into the care of a young mother in a small town called Bethlehem. He chose this way—not despite His greatness, but because of it. He came to meet us where we are, to show us that His love does not depend on grandeur or strength.

Today, Bethlehem feels like heaven on earth. The stars seem brighter, as if they too are celebrating, and the air is filled with the songs of angels. It's as if creation itself is leaning in, amazed by what has happened. Even though we cannot fully understand how God did this, we don't need to. God's ways are beyond ours, but His love is something we can see and feel.

This day is a mystery, but it is also a miracle. God, who is eternal and all-powerful, chose to become a human being, just like us. He did not stop being God, but He became one of us so that we could be closer to Him. He did not need to do this—He wanted to. Out of love, He entered our world to save us and show us what life is meant to be.

The kings from faraway lands understood this. They traveled a long distance, following the light of a star, to bow before the true King. They did not come to see palaces or armies. They came to worship a baby lying in a manger, because they saw something extraordinary: God's glory wrapped in the humblest of circumstances.

This birth is unlike any other. It is not just a moment in history; it is the turning point for all creation. Through Jesus, heaven and earth are now connected in a new way. God is not distant anymore. He is here, with us. Angels and humans are no longer separated by fear. Instead, we're united in worship and love.

Imagine the scene: a mother cradling her newborn child, and yet this baby is the eternal God who created her. The One who holds the universe in His hands is now small enough to be held in hers. The One who feeds all creation now relies on His mother to feed Him. It is almost impossible to wrap our minds around it, but that is the beauty of it. This is how far God was willing to go to reach us.

Why would God do this? To teach us, to lead us, and to save us. He came to show us what we often miss: that life is not about power or riches or success. It is about love, humility, and faith. By becoming one of us, He showed us that every life—no matter how small or humble—is sacred. He took on our struggles so that we could share in His victory.

And what a victory it is! Today, sin loses its grip on us, death is defeated, and heaven's gates are opened wide. The darkness of the world is pierced by the light of God's truth and love. Peace takes root where fear once grew, and kindness spreads where selfishness once ruled.

This is not just a celebration for one night; it is a promise for all time. God is with us now, and nothing can separate us from His love. The baby in the manger is a sign of hope for everyone—for the rich and poor, the strong and weak, the joyful and the brokenhearted.



So, what can we do in response? We can celebrate. We can let our hearts be filled with gratitude and joy. We can share this love and hope with others, just as God shared Himself with us.

Today is not just another day; it is the day everything changed. The God who seemed so far away has come close. He did not come in a way that demands fear or awe but in a way that invites us to draw near. He came as a child, so that we could approach Him without hesitation.

Let us rejoice in this gift. Let us remember that in the humblest of beginnings, the greatest of love was born. And let us offer our praise to the One who has brought heaven and earth together.

To Jesus Christ, who makes all things new, and to the Father and the Holy Spirit, we give all honor and glory, now and forever. Amen. ✝

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### ***SERMON: Solemnity of Humble Shepherds***

#### **"Let Us Go to Bethlehem"**

#### **The Shepherds of Bethlehem: Witnesses of the Nativity and Models for Our Faith**

Artistic depictions of shepherds in Nativity scenes often vary widely, sometimes omitting them or reducing their presence to a single figure. This contrasts with the Gospel of Luke, which describes multiple shepherds as the first witnesses of Christ's birth. Paintings, by comparison, frequently include several shepherds, emphasizing their collective role in this sacred event. Simplified Nativity representations, while practical, can unintentionally downplay the shepherds' symbolic importance as humble, faithful witnesses to the Messiah's arrival.



The shepherds play a crucial role in the Nativity story, underscoring themes of humility, faith, and inclusivity. Reimagining Nativity art with fuller depictions of shepherds can enrich the appreciation of their essential role, reminding us that God's message of salvation is for all people, beginning with society's lowly and overlooked.

In the Gospel of Luke, the angelic announcement to the shepherds is central to the Christmas narrative. The angel declares, "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." This joyful proclamation is followed by the heavenly hosts praising God, marking the arrival of Christ as a moment of cosmic significance. The shepherds, moved by wonder, respond with resolve: "Let us go to Bethlehem!"

Their words are more than a call to action; they are an invitation for all believers to undertake a spiritual journey. For us, Bethlehem symbolizes the moments and places where we encounter Christ—in our hearts, our relationships, and the everyday realities of life. This invitation challenges us to seek Jesus actively, just as the shepherds did.

The message of Christmas is the Good News of salvation, offered not as a reward for human deeds but as a gift of God's mercy. St. Paul's letter to Titus reminds us: "Not because of any

righteous deeds that we have done, but because of God’s mercy.” This mercy is embodied in the humility of Christ’s birth, not in a palace but in a stable, not witnessed first by kings but by shepherds—simple laborers on the fringes of society.

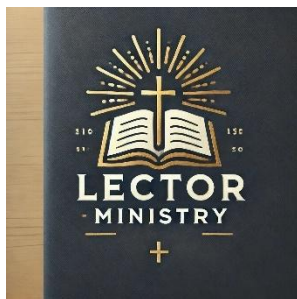
The inclusion of shepherds in the Nativity story is no accident. Throughout salvation history, God has revealed His glory to the humble and lowly. King David, once a shepherd, was chosen to lead Israel, and the prophets often spoke of God as the Shepherd of His people. By sending His angels to the shepherds on that first Christmas night, God reaffirmed His care for the meek and lowly, those who watch and protect. In Christ, we find the Good Shepherd, who lays down His life for His sheep.

The shepherds’ immediate response to the angelic message sets an example of faith in action. They journeyed to Bethlehem with haste, bearing wonder and faith. Their encounter with Christ transformed them, and they returned glorifying and praising God. More importantly, they became the first evangelists, sharing the Good News of Christ’s birth.

This Christmas, we are called to follow the shepherds’ example. Like them, we are invited to encounter Jesus—not just in the Nativity scene but in the Eucharist and the faces of those around us. Our worship at Mass echoes the shepherds’ adoration and the angels’ song. Yet, worship does not end at the altar; it compels us to proclaim the Good News of salvation to a world in need.

Christmas is not merely a single day but a way of life. As we celebrate, let us carry forward its message of love, humility, and generosity into our daily lives. Like the shepherds, let us glorify and praise God, sharing His love and mercy with all.

So, as we hear the words “Let us go to Bethlehem,” let us respond with open hearts, meeting Jesus in the manger and in the lives of those we encounter every day. ✝



### **Announcement: Calling All Lectors!**

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Do you feel called to proclaim the Word of God? Our parish is seeking dedicated individuals to serve as lectors during Mass. Lectors play a vital role in bringing Scripture to life, helping to inspire and guide our congregation. If you are interested in sharing your voice and faith in this meaningful ministry, we encourage you to reach out. Training will be provided to ensure you feel confident and prepared.

Please contact Father Jim for more information or to sign up. Together, let us share the Word of the Lord!

**Information regarding the Reception of the Holy Eucharist** Baptized Christians who believe in the true presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist and have prepared themselves through the Sacrament of Penance are invited to partake of this Holy Sacrament. It is the practice of the PNCC to distribute the Holy Eucharist through the method of intinction. The Body of Christ is immersed into the Precious Blood and is placed on the tongue and not in the hand of the communicant. Come and let us be one with our Lord.