
ST CATHERINE OF SIENA PARISH

+JMJ+

3 December 2023

Dear Parish Family,

Advent is the time in the Church's liturgical calendar that we contemplate the two-fold coming of Christ first at the end of world and at the end of time and secondly, as that beautiful baby in the manger at Christmas. However, let's focus on Jesus' Second Coming. "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find Faith on Earth (LK 18:8)." When Jesus comes again, will He find Faith in men's and women's hearts and souls here on Earth? Hopefully, we can answer Jesus with the enthusiastic words: "Yes, Lord!"; but, we should not answer Jesus with just words but that both our daily lives and daily actions speak this enthusiastically: "Yes, Lord!" much louder than any words we could ever speak!!! Hopefully, our daily lives and daily actions demonstrate, spread, and shed "sparks" of Faith.

These "sparks" of Faith can be so many things just to name a few: including prayer cards in various cards (i.e., birthday, anniversary, get well, Christmas, Easter, graduation, etc.), sharing and disseminating various pamphlets on various topics of the Catholic Faith, visiting the sick, homebound, and those in care facilities, donating food to those in need, making meals for those in need, Faithful weekend Mass attendance, praying both the Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet daily and teaching others to do so by in-person assistance and/or providing Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet pamphlets on how to pray them, etc. These "sparks" of Faith grab someone's attention and get them to think about their Faith and their Faith's expression in their love of both God and Neighbor.

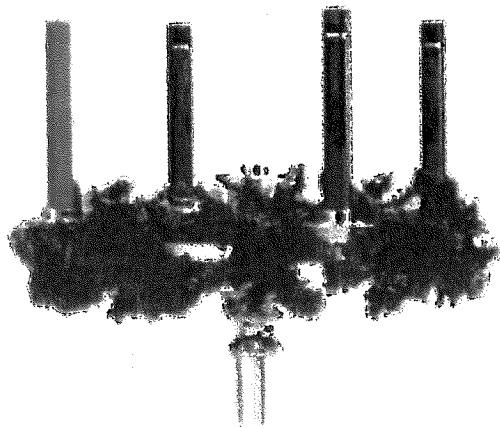
Spreading these "sparks" of Faith into prisons, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, Churches, the sick, older people who are either homebound or in care facilities, missionaries, pastors, evangelists, teachers, parents, our Latino brothers and sisters, and in so many locations and to so many people. These "sparks" of Faith help those with no access to the internet, a prayer card and/or pamphlet is short and takes only a few minutes to read and absorb, which the prayer/message may provide the "spark" needed to understand a new aspect of the Faith or find the spiritual courage to go to the Sacrament of Confession after a very long period of time.

This Advent season, Jesus is standing at the gates of our hearts and souls and knocking. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me" (Rev 3:20). Will we let Jesus into our hearts and souls? Will we, through these "sparks" of Faith, help others let Jesus in? We can do this by focusing on a prayerful Advent by preparing our souls for His Second Coming!

We can belabor the very discouraging state of our nation and our world right now, but to what avail? The fact is God has placed all of us to be in the here and now precisely at this time, and He has given us just the right gifts to become saints right where we are, in these sobering circumstances of our own lives, our nation, our Church, and our world!

Please join me by focusing on a prayerful Advent by preparing our souls for His coming in our daily lives and daily actions by demonstrating, spreading, and shedding "sparks" of Faith by BOTH our love of God and our love of Neighbor!

God's Blessings for a prayerful and grace-filled Advent, Christmas, and New Year,
Fr. Jeffrey Ballou, Pastor



Advent Wreath

1st CANDLE – (purple) THE PROPHECY CANDLE or CANDLE OF HOPE – We can have hope because God is faithful and will keep the promises made to us. Our hope comes from God. (Romans 15:12-13)

2nd CANDLE – (purple) THE BETHLEHEM CANDLE or THE CANDLE OF PREPARATION – God kept his promise of a Savior who would be born in Bethlehem. Preparation means to “get ready” Help us to be ready to welcome YOU, O GOD! (Luke 3:4-6)

3rd CANDLE – (pink) THE SHEPHERD CANDLE or THE CANDLE OF JOY – The angels sang a message of JOY! (Luke 2:7-15)

4th CANDLE – (purple) THE ANGEL CANDLE or THE CANDLE OF LOVE – The angels announced the good news of a Savior. God sent his only Son to earth to save us, because he loves us! (John 3:16-17)

5th CANDLE – (white) “CHRIST CANDLE” – The white candle reminds us that Jesus is the spotless lamb of God, sent to wash away our sins! His birth was for his death, his death was for our birth! (John 1:29)

Immaculate CONCEPTION

The Immaculate Conception is the doctrine that Mary, conceived in the normal way through an act of love by her mother and father (St. Joachim and St. Anne), was born free of original sin and its effects from the first moment of her existence. This special favor was conferred on her because of her role in God's plan for our salvation. Historically, this doctrine has sometimes been

misunderstood as the conception of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit in the feast we know as the Annunciation. Instead, the Immaculate Conception celebrates the special gift of God's grace to Mary because she was to be the mother of Jesus, God's chosen agent to bring about

our salvation. We hail Mary in faith and prayer because she is "full of grace" and because "the Lord is with her." In other words, Mary was filled with God's life well before the Messiah was conceived in her womb.

After consulting with the bishops of the Church, Pope Pius IX first solemnly defined the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in 1854 in the Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*.

The Immaculate Conception has the distinction of being one of only two formal Church dogmas to be solemnly defined by the full teaching authority of popes rather than general Councils (the other being Mary's Assumption). This means that the Immaculate Conception has been solemnly defined as an infallible teaching to be believed by the whole Church. We not only believe that this is our truth, but we also try to imitate the meaning of this truth. While we honor Mary for the privilege of being without sin, we also try to be like her in becoming faithful bearers of Christ in the world. As we strive for greater integrity in our words and actions we allow God to work in us to help transform our world into one of greater justice and love. Thus we imitate Mary and become the kind of disciples that Jesus praises in the Gospel: "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it (Luke 11:28).



The Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55)

And Mary said:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.

Mary, Mother of the Church

Jesus gave Mary to the Church from the cross when he told his beloved disciple, “Behold your mother” (John 19:26-27). Mary was present in the upper room with the other disciples on Pentecost, when the Church was born (Acts 1:13-14). Over the centuries of Christianity, Mary has been sought out by the faithful who find in her support for their own lives of discipleship. As one whose own life of faith was not easy or simple, Mary is a companion who can show us a path in our everyday lives and in our suffering.

Mary is a wonderful example of what happens when one opens oneself to the life and power of God. As at the marriage at Cana, Mary always directs our attention to Jesus, saying “Do whatever he tells you.” (John 2:5). Mary is not a goddess wielding power. Neither is she controlling and domineering nor cold and aloof. Mary is there for us whenever we need her.

WHY DEFINE THIS DOCTRINE?

The doctrine of Mary’s Immaculate Conception affirms that through God’s grace she was never separated from God by sin. Over the centuries Mary’s freedom from original sin—the teaching that every human is born in the wrong relationship with God (this is what sin is and does) and so must be freed from this condition through God’s grace (this is what salvation is and does)—was disputed by theologians who could not agree.

After consulting with the Bishops of the Church to confirm that almost all Catholics believed this doctrine, Pope Pius IX first solemnly proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854 in these words: We declare, pronounce and define that the doctrine which asserts that the Blessed Virgin Mary, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God, and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, was preserved free from every stain of original sin is a doctrine revealed by God and, for this reason, must be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful.

WHY DECEMBER 8?

December 8 is the liturgical celebration of Mary’s Immaculate Conception, i.e., her being “adorned from the first moment of her conception with the splendors of an entirely unique holiness” (Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, #56). This date was chosen because it is 9 months (the time of a child’s gestation in the mother’s womb) before the traditional celebration of the feast of the Nativity of Mary on September 8.

A Prayer for the Immaculate Conception

We thank you, O Mother, because in showing yourself to us
You free us of all stain of sin;

You remind us that what comes first is the grace of God,
The love of Jesus Christ who gave his life for us,

The strength of the Holy Spirit which renews all things.

Let us not give in to discouragement,

But, trusting in your constant help,

Let us engage ourselves fully in renewal of self,

Of this city and of the entire world.

Pray for us, Holy Mother of God!

—Pope Francis

ADVENT

God Comes Among Us

More than just a memory of the past, Advent is a celebration of the seeds of our faith, the gift of God's grace gradually growing to fulfillment in the world. Like the people of ancient Israel, we long for the completion of God's reign on earth. At the same time, we know that our redemption has been won for us and that our sins have been forgiven. As we celebrate Advent in the liturgy of the Church, we experience the longing for Christ in our lives as we wait in a hope that is joyful because we have been redeemed. Just as our world is in desperate need of God's grace, our own lives are in need of reform to live more fully in Christ. The rituals of preparation at home and in church remind us that this special time of the year is more than just a winter holiday. Miraculously born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus continues to come among us through the sacraments, Scripture and the Christian community gathered in prayer. May we experience the presence of Christ, the proclamation of the Kingdom and the call to conversion this Advent season.

History of Advent

Advent began after the 4th century as a time of preparation for Epiphany—not in anticipation of Christmas. Epiphany celebrated the birth and manifestation of Christ by remembering the visit of the Magi and the baptism of Jesus. At this time new Christians were baptized and received into the faith, and so the early Church instituted a 40-day period of fasting and repentance.

Later, in the 6th century, Pope St. Gregory the Great was the first to associate this season of Advent with the coming of Christ. Originally it was not the coming of the Christ-child that was anticipated, but rather, the second coming of Christ.

By the Middle Ages the Church had extended the celebration of Advent to the familiar format we know today. The early weeks are rich with the prophecies of Isaiah, reminding us to wait and prepare for the coming Messiah. Later, the pace quickens and we focus more directly on the events leading up to Jesus' birth.



Celebrating with the Advent Wreath

One way to prepare for Christ's coming into our lives is to make an Advent wreath for your daily household worship. This traditional circular wreath reminds us that God, like the circle, has no beginning and no end. Evergreens on the wreath symbolize our everlasting relationship with God, the source of continuous new life.

The wreath has four candles, three purple or violet and one rose. On the First Sunday and Week of Advent, we light the first candle and then an additional candle on each Sunday until Christmas. Purple is a royal color, reflecting the kingship of Christ and also repentance. The rose candle, lighted on the Third Sunday of Advent, represents joy. Thus, the colors of the candles illustrate the themes of Advent: kingship, repentance and joy. The candles also remind us that the incarnation has transformed the darkness of hatred and evil into the light of joy and love.

Let your Advent wreath become the center around which your household gathers together each night during this joyous, but sometimes frenzied, season of celebration. And as you celebrate with the Advent wreath, include your favorite Advent hymns and songs, scripture readings and prayers focusing on Christ's threefold Advent—past, present and future.

Prayer for Lighting the Advent Wreath

Lord God of all creation,
you came among us as an infant
in Bethlehem long ago.

Come to us now
as we prepare to celebrate your birth
and look forward to your coming
in glory at the end of time.

May the light of this wreath remind us
of the power of your steadfast love for us
over the darkness of fear, evil and death.
May we praise you all the days of our lives.
Bless our preparation for your coming. *Amen*

THE "O ANTIPHONS"

The **O Antiphons** refer to the seven verses that are recited (or chanted) preceding the *Magnificat* during Vespers of the Liturgy of the Hours. They cover the special period of Advent preparation known as the Octave before Christmas, December 17-23. These antiphons form the basis of the Advent hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," put to music in 15th century France.

December 17—*O Wisdom*, O holy Word of God, you govern all creation with your strong yet tender care. Come and show your people the way to salvation.

December 18—*O Sacred Lord* of ancient Israel, who showed yourself to Moses in the burning bush, who gave him the holy law on Sinai mountain: come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free.

December 19—*O Flower of Jesse's Stem*, you have been raised up as a sign for all peoples; kings stand silent in your presence; the nations bow down in worship before you. Come, let nothing keep you from coming to our aid.

December 20—*O Key of David*, O royal Power of Israel controlling at your will the gate of heaven: come, break down the prison walls of death for those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death; and lead your captive people into freedom.

December 21—*O Radiant Dawn*, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice, come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.

December 22—*O King* of all the nations, the only joy of every human heart, O Keystone of the mighty arch of humanity, come and save the creature you fashioned from the dust.

December 23—*O Emmanuel*, king and lawgiver, desire of the nations, Savior of all people, come and set us free, Lord our God.

MASS READINGS FOR ADVENT 2023

1st Sunday..... Is 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7;
1 Cor 1:3-9; Mk 13:33-37

2nd Sunday..... Is 40:1-5, 9-11;
2 Pt 3:8-14; Mk 1:1-8

3rd Sunday..... Is 61:1-2a, 10-11;
1 Thes 5:16-24; Jn 1:6-8, 19-28

4th Sunday..... 2 Sm 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16;
Rom 16:25-27; Lk 1:26-38

Christmas Day..... Is 52:7-10;
Heb 1:1-6; Jn 1:1-18 or 1:1-5, 9-14

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS 2023 SCHEDULE

CHRISTMAS CONCERT: BEFORE AND AFTER WITH A RECEPTION

Sunday, 3 December @ 2:00pm Parish Center

ADVENT CONFESSION SCHEDULE:

Thursday, 14 December @ 1:00-2:00pm or until the last person

Thursday, 14 December @ 6:00-7:00pm or until the last person

Sunday, 17 December @ 2:00pm-until the last penitent with Various Priests

Saturday, 23 December @ 2:00pm-3:45pm, SHARP!

ST. ANDREW'S CHRISTMAS PRAYER: Begins 30 Nov thru 24 Dec 2023

Hail and blessed be the hour and moment in which the Son of God was born of the most pure Virgin Mary, at midnight in Bethlehem, in the piercing cold. In that hour vouchsafe, I beseech Thee, O my God, to hear my prayer and grant my desires through the merits of Our Savior, Jesus Christ, and of His Blessed Mother. Amen.

(It is piously believed that whoever recites the above prayer fifteen times a day from the feast of St. Andrew, November 30th, until Christmas Eve, December 24th, will obtain what is asked.)

INFANT OF PRAGUE NOVENA: Begins 17-25 Dec 2023

O miraculous Infant Jesus, prostrate before Your sacred image, we beseech You to cast a merciful look on our troubled hearts. Let your tender heart so inclined to pity be softened by our prayers, and grant us that grace for which we ardently implore _____.
Take from us all affliction and despair, all trials and misfortunes with which we are laden. For Your sacred infancy's sake hear our prayers and send us consolation and aid, that we may praise You with the Father and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen!

CHRISTMAS EVE AND DAY MASS SCHEDULE (SAME AS THE WEEKEND MASS SCHEDULE)

Christmas Eve, 24 December, Sunday @ 4:00pm

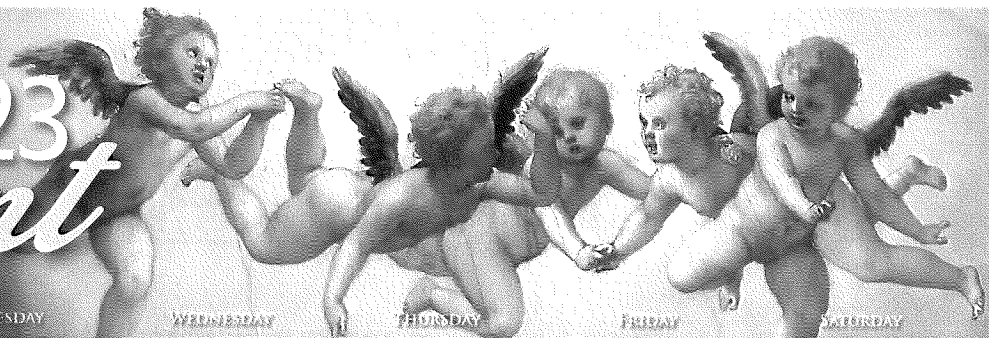
Christmas Day, 25 December, Monday @ 9:00am and 11:00am

NEW YEARS EVE AND DAY MASS SCHEDULE (SAME AS THE WEEKEND MASS SCHEDULE)

New Years, 31 December, Sunday @ 4:00pm

New Years, 1 January, Monday @ 9:00am and 11:00am

2023 Advent



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
3 DECEMBER Come Down, O God! Invite God to be with us this Advent. <i>Isaiah 64:2-3</i>	4 Come and Cure Us, Jesus! Ask Jesus to heal us in mind and body. <i>Matthew 8:5-7</i>	5 Send Your Spirit Upon Us Ask the Holy Spirit to be with you today. <i>Isaiah 11:2-3</i>	6 Call on God and Be Saved! If we grow in trust, God will give us new life. <i>Romans 10:9-13</i>	7 ST. AMBROSE Trust in God Always Ask God to guard and keep you from harm. <i>Isaiah 26:4</i>	8 IMMACULATE CONCEPTION Say "Yes" As Mary Did Let God be born now and live in us. <i>Luke 1:38</i>	9 God Will Answer Me When we cry out to God, we know God will be there for us. <i>Isaiah 30:19-20</i>
10 One Mightier Is Coming! Spend time today to make room for Jesus in your life. <i>Mark 1:7</i>	11 Your Sins Are Forgiven Let us forgive others as we have been forgiven. <i>Luke 5:20</i>	12 OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE Proclaim God's Greatness! Let us tell someone today what God means to us. <i>Luke 1:46-47</i>	13 ST. LUCY God Will Not Get Weary Ask God to give you strength to change your life. <i>Isaiah 40:28-31</i>	14 ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS God Will Help Us Ask God to help you become more like Jesus. <i>Isaiah 41:13</i>	15 Lead Us to Yourself, O God Let us follow more closely God's ways today. <i>Isaiah 48:17</i>	16 Give Us New Life Let us turn from our sinful ways and let God heal us. <i>Psalms 80:18-19</i>
17 God Is My Joy Share your joy that God is coming nearer. <i>Isaiah 61:10</i>	18 Joseph Accepts Jesus Like Joseph, let us decide to focus our life on Jesus. <i>Matthew 1:18-25</i>	19 Trust God's Messengers Like Zechariah, trust in God and not be afraid. <i>Luke 1:10-17</i>	20 Nothing Is Impossible for God! Like Mary, invite God to be with you. <i>Luke 1:36-38</i>	21 Share Your Joy Like Elizabeth and Mary, share your joy today. <i>Luke 1:39-45</i>	22 God Has Come to Help! Mary praises God who always helps those in need. <i>Luke 1:46-56</i>	23 The Messenger is Born! John the Baptist's birth prepares for that of Jesus. <i>Luke 1:57-66</i>
24 Do Not Be Afraid! Like Mary, let us welcome Christ into our lives. <i>Luke 1:30-32</i>	25 CHRISTMAS A Child Is Born for Us Jesus becomes like us so we may become like him. <i>Isaiah 9:6-7</i>					