

Celebrating Christian Mystery

Incarnation, The Word Made Flesh!

All the baptized are called to participate in the celebration of Christian mystery. For some this starts with an awareness of being immersed in mystery and then reflecting on the words our Tradition gives us. For others it starts with an awareness that we have reached the limits of what our intellect can teach us, and subsequently being drawn into the wonder and awe of mystery. Immersion into Mystery and Tradition work together to lead us to transformation.

December 2009

Dear Friends:

As Christmas draws near, we again remember the event that was so inconceivable to ancient philosophers and religious leaders that it was regarded as preposterous: God becoming human. Not God being friends with humans, or sending kind wishes to humans, or offering a messenger as a go-between. No, God deciding to identify His very self with the likes of us. We all know how messy and imperfect human existence can be, and how perfectly holy God is, right? So how could this be? It's beyond anything reasonable. Indeed it is! That's why it's such wonderful news. When we are discouraged by the often frustratingly insignificant powers that we have to fix the world, our families and friendships, and even our own lives, on our own, the Incarnation is our enduring assurance that we don't have to attempt that by ourselves. God decided to do that with us. This month's faith formation activities will focus on the marvelous transformation that God brought to the world when we needed it most—and we still need it. May this be a season of relishing the hope that is rightfully ours because of the One who has reached out to us.

Fr. Mike Byron

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

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Children grow up immersed in what can be negative aspects of our cultural Christmas: requisite layers of shopping and holiday trees in stores at Thanksgiving. But in our Catholic-Christian tradition they also encounter Advent wreaths and crèche sets waiting for Baby Jesus. For pre-school children, being a baby is a recent event. What they haven't learned about their own birth in words and pictures can often be observed in the arrival of siblings, cousins and neighbors. Talk about waiting for a baby to arrive is often familiar to them.

We begin our ritual waiting on the First Sunday of Advent by talking about people who lived long before Jesus did. These prophets said that someday a very special baby would be born. As we construct our Advent wreath and light our first candle, we talk about our first prophecy: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." (Isaiah 9:2)



The early part of our Advent time is devoted to prophecies of the birth of Jesus. After the Prophecy of Light we explore the Prophecy of the Names: "For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6) It's a long prophecy, and so we focus on the four names and what they tell us about who the baby will be when he's grown up. We also play the matching *Chorus* from Part I of *Messiah*. Later in Advent we present *The Prophecy of the Mother* (Isaiah 7:14), *The Prophecy of Bethlehem* (Micah 5:2) and *The Prophecy of the Star and the Sceptre* (Numbers 24:17)

Finally we follow Mary through the Annunciation and Visitation, and begin her journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem with Joseph. At the end of Mary and Joseph's journey, our Advent wreath is bright with four candles. Children gently place infants into Nativity scenes where they belong. From a variety of perspectives the children have been led to the Incarnation, the mystery of God who becomes a child in order to live among us.

Youth News

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'Tis the season to be giving fa la la la la, la la la. There are a number of ways you can give this year.

This year the parish will be doing a Giving Tree. This is a chance for us to pick the name of a child or adult that will not be receiving any gifts this year unless we give them to them. You can help by picking a name and purchasing a gift for the child or provide me with ideas for kids around your age. Please email me your gift suggestions by Wednesday, December 9th. You can also give your time by helping to wrap the presents on Saturday, December 19th at 10:00 a.m. in Fellowship Hall. You are more than welcome to invite friends and family to this event. It will be a fun day for all!

And for some fun this month, we will be joining the youth at St. Mark's for their Teen Mass and Youth Night on Sunday, December 6th. We will meet at St. Cecilia's at 4:30 p.m. to carpool over to St. Mark's and then return around 7:45 p.m. Please RSVP to Cindy by 3:00 p.m. on Sunday, December 6th so I know how many cars we will need.

Keep your eyes peeled for a future date and information to make ice candles for Christmas Eve Mass!

Adult Faith Formation

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I'm reading a short book by Fr. Michael Himes called *The Mystery of Faith*, which quotes Karl Rahner as saying there is really only one mystery of faith, but we explore it from many different facets. This month's facet is the Incarnation and the fact that through Jesus Christ, our humanity is what links us to God and to each other. Since human beings are created in God's image, it is by being fully and authentically human that we become holy.

He also suggests that the original temptation - the way that evil entered the world - is because of the rejection of the goodness of being human. The first chapter of Genesis says we are created in God's image, but the third chapter has the serpent saying to eat the forbidden fruit in order to be like God, when in reality they were already like God.

What would the world look like if we all believed in the true dignity of humanity?
What does it mean to be fully human?
Do I see God in others? Do others see God in me?

Adult formation opportunities in December --

Please note there is no Whole Community Wednesday in December but we will be making short "journals" available for you to take home. These have some quotes from scripture and from the Tradition on the monthly focus along with some discussion questions to reflect on as individuals or as families.

Wednesday, December 9 - Art Zannoni will lead us in an exploration of the infancy narrative in Luke's gospel. Last week Art led us through Matthew's gospel and gave us much to ponder and reflect on. The infancy narratives don't just tell us about the baby but they tell us about our humanity.

Sunday, December 13 - Whole Community Sunday - We will explore the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. What does it mean to know that the one who sits at the right hand of God is fully human?

Saturday, December 19 - Movie Night. Our second Saturday movie night has been moved to the third Saturday. Take a break from the frenzy of the season and join us to watch *The Fourth Wise Man*. It's a great intergenerational opportunity to come together, watch a movie and reflect on our faith at all ages and stages.

We all know about the three wise men that brought gifts to baby Jesus 2,000 years ago. Much folklore and myth surround the event. Children and adults re-enact this great event every December. But have you heard about the elusive fourth wise man? Martin Sheen is known as Artaban, a magi who is the fourth wise man. He is a prominent physician and learned man who carefully watches the stars and is convinced that the Christ child has come to earth. Much to the dismay of his closest friends and mostly-loyal servant, Orontes (Alan Arkin) he sells his great fortune to set out in search of this baby born in Israel. He sets off on his journey with only a few small provisions, but with precious gifts fit for a king. "The Fourth Wise Man" documents this fictional, yet realistic story (based on Henry van Dyke's classic, "The Story of the Other Wise Man"). What happens to him and his wise-cracking servant during their much-prolonged journey to find Jesus is a fascinating tale, full of subtle humor, irony, and sensitivity.

While "The Fourth Wise Man" features several big-name actors including Martin Sheen, Charlie Sheen (in a cameo role), and Eileen Brennan, there is refreshingly nothing offensive at all. With good photography and an easy-to-follow plot, it is a great film for family viewing, appropriate for both children and adults. The theme that shines clear is that any life spent serving the poor and needy is truly spent serving Christ himself.

This year we are also going to look at the gospel through images and art. We are inviting you to sign up as a family, a group, a committee, or an individual to read an upcoming Sunday gospel (of the week you sign up) and bring in any form of artwork that inspires you after reflection on that particular gospel. The artwork will be displayed in the vestibule on the appropriate Sunday and then moved to the link. The plan is that at the end of the year we will have the liturgical year in visio. Please talk to Marge or Cindy if you are interested in being part of this or would like more information.

Lastly, check out the parish library - we have a whole section of books that focus on the Incarnation and who is Jesus - before and after Christianity.

