

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 24, 2023



Transfiguration of the Lord Parish

**Saint Mary 14 Park Street + Sacred Heart 58 Church Street + Saint Mark 105 Stanley Street
North Attleborough, Massachusetts**

Transfiguration of the Lord Parish

Rev. David A. Costa, Pastor
Rev. Deacon Joseph E. Regali, Parish Deacon
Sister Kathleen A. Corrigan, S.U.S.C., Pastoral Associate
Rev. Kenneth R. Sicard, O.P. & Rev. R. Gabriel Pivarnik, O.P., Weekend Assistants
Mrs. Martha O'Neill, Administrative Assistant
Mrs. Jean Howard, Business Manager
Mrs. Elaine Corvese, Director of Religious Education
Mrs. Lisa Serak, Principal, Saint Mary-Sacred Heart School
Mr. Adam Turcotte, Director of Music
Mr. Miguel Peixoto, Buildings Supervisor
Mr. James Kitsock, Building Maintenance

Saint Mary-Sacred Heart School

Mrs. Lisa Serak, Principal
57 Richards Avenue,
North Attleborough, Massachusetts 02760
(508) 695-3072 FAX (508) 695-9074
smsh@smsh.dfrcs.org www.smshschool.com

Saint Mary Cemetery

Mr. Jarrod Ward, Superintendent
Towne Street
North Attleborough, Massachusetts 02760
(508) 695-1173 or email ripco@comcast.net

Sacrament of Reconciliation

Saint Mary Church • Saturday 3:00 pm – 3:30 pm

Sacrament of Baptism

Baptisms are celebrated on designated Sunday afternoons at 12:30 pm, with a limit of four families at each baptism. Please contact the office at stmaryna@noozi.com for more information and available dates/locations.

Sacrament of Marriage

Marriage is usually celebrated on Saturday morning and afternoon. Please contact the Parish Office at least nine months in advance to begin preparation.

Sacrament of the Sick

Pastoral care to those in need of the sacrament of the sick is arranged through the parish office. Please call to arrange a visit.

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is offered on the first Friday of each month in **Saint Mark Church** beginning at 9:00 am and ending at 6:00 pm with Benediction.

Parish Offering

If you are attending in person, you may drop your contribution in the collection basket. You are welcome to mail your budget envelope to the parish office, at 14 Park Street, North Attleborough, MA 02760. You may also leave your envelope in the drop box located outside the parish office door, to the right on the landing. Or you can use this link for online giving:

<https://app.gabrielsoft.com/guest/mafrdiocese/31>

Thank you for your ongoing support!

Weekend Masses

Saturday 4:00 pm **Saint Mary Church**
Sunday 8:00 am **Saint Mark Church**
Sunday 9:30 am **Saint Mary Church**
Sunday 11:00 am **Sacred Heart Church**

Weekday Masses

Monday 8:00 am **Saint Mark Church**
Tuesday 4:30 pm **Saint Mark Church**
Wednesday 8:00 am **Saint Mark Church**
Thursday 8:00 am Communion Service
Saint Mark Church

Links to: Transfiguration of the Lord Facebook page
<https://www.facebook.com/Transfiguration-of-the-Lord-Parish-North-Attleborough-106529317647894/>

YouTube at <https://tinyurl.com/ysfaxaty>

Parish Office

14 Park Street, North Attleborough,
Massachusetts 02760
Parish e-mail • stmaryna@noozi.com
Parish website • www.saintmaryna.com
Phone 508-695-6161 Fax 508-695-5248
Faith Formation • TransfigurationRelEd@gmail.com
Faith Formation • 508-695-3823
Music Ministry • transfiguration.na.music@gmail.com



December 23/24 – The 4th Sunday of Advent

Saturday

4:00 pm

December 23 – Vigil (St. Mary)

Larry Flint

Susan, Norman & Karen Dudley

Julie Paquin

Sunday

9:30 am

December 24 (St. Mary)

Margaret Ralph

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December 24/25 – The Nativity of the Lord

All Christmas Masses are offered in memory of our deceased parishioners, loved ones, and all those whose names are inscribed in our Christmas Memorial Book.

Sunday

4:00 pm

4:00 pm

4:00 pm

9:00 pm

Monday

8:00 am

9:30 am

December 24

St. Mary Church

Sacred Heart Church

St. Mark Church

Sacred Heart Church

December 25

St. Mark Church

St. Mary Church

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Tuesday

December 26

No Mass or devotions today

Wednesday

December 27

No Mass today

Thursday

December 28

No Communion Service today

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December 30/31 – The Feast of the Holy Family

Saturday

4:00 pm

December 30 – Vigil (St. Mary)

Rita Kelleher

Grace Miniscalco

Sunday

8:00 am

December 31 (St. Mark)

Joseph Dery

Sunday

9:30 am

December 31 (St. Mary)

Deceased Members of the

Dowgiala Family

Sunday

11:00 am

December 31 (Sacred Heart)

Tricia Hand Seery

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Parish Contributions

Not available due to early publishing deadline.

The figures will be printed in next weekend's bulletin.

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Tuesday Communal Rosary Schedule

Tuesday, December 26, 2023: No Mass or devotions today

Tuesday, January 2, 2024: Rosary for Life (4PM)

Tuesday, January 9, 2024: Rosary for Life (4PM)

2023 Christmas Mass Schedule



There will be six (6) Masses celebrated for the **Christmas** holy day in our parish. Each of our churches will have two Masses. As the 4:00 p.m. Vigil Mass is the most popular with our parishioners, there will be three 4:00 p.m. celebrations. The solemn Mass for Christmas will be celebrated at 9:00 p.m. in Sacred Heart Church. The Roman Missal (the official prayerbook for Mass) no longer refers to this as Midnight Mass. Now it is called "Mass in the Night." This Mass will feature our choir and instrumentalists. There will be a concert of Christmas music before the Mass. The full schedule for Christmas Masses is as follows:

Saint Mary Church

Christmas Eve, December 24, Mass @ 4:00 p.m.

Christmas Day, December 25 @ 9:30 a.m.

Sacred Heart Church

Christmas Eve, December 24, Mass @ 4:00 p.m.

Christmas Eve, December 24, Mass @ 9:00 p.m.

Saint Mark Church

Christmas Eve, December 24, Mass @ 4:00 p.m.

Christmas Day, December 25 @ 8:00 a.m.

Because people always ask, I also want you to know that the collection taken on Christmas remains 100% in the parish. Many thanks for your generosity and commitment to Transfiguration Parish.

Parish Office Closure

In order for our parish staff to enjoy some time with family and friends, the parish office will be closed **December 26 and 27**. The office will also be closed on **Monday, January 1**. Your patient understanding is very much appreciated!



Christmas Prayer

May the blessing of joy abide within you.

May the blessing of peace rest upon you.

May the blessing of love flow out through you.

May all the blessings of the Lord be yours,
at Christmas and in the new year.

(author unknown)

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year
from your parish staff:

*Fr. Dave, Fr. Ken, Fr. Gabriel, Deacon Joe, S. Kathee,
Martha, Jean, Elaine, Lisa, Miles, Adam, Mike, and Jim*

2023 Annual Appeal

It is with profound gratitude and much pride, that I write this report for the 2023 Grand Annual Appeal. Our statistics are as follows:

Total # of households contacted:	3,334
Total # of responses:	659
Total % of participation:	19.77%
Total amount donated/pledged:	\$213,602.00
Total amount paid:	\$212,127.00
Average pledge:	\$324.13
% of pledged collected:	99.31 %

While the “official” appeal period has ended, anyone wishing to make a contribution to the Annual Appeal, may do so at any time. This is especially true as we look toward end-of-year contributions for 2023 tax purposes.

Please know my sincere thanks for your tremendous generosity to Transfiguration of the Lord Parish. The trust you have shown is humbling and your support is encouraging and very much appreciated. May you know God’s fullest blessings! ~Fr. Costa

Daily Mass During Christmas Week

Please note: we will **NOT** celebrate daily Mass on **Tuesday** through **Thursday, December 26 to December 28**. Thank you in advance for your understanding!

2023 Christmas Fair Report

Many, many thanks to all who contributed so generously in so many different ways to make the 2023 Transfiguration of the Lord Christmas Fair such a resounding success! A profit of **\$41,326.00** was raised for parish use! This amazing amount reflects the hard work, enthusiastic spirit, and generous sharing of gifts and talents by a large army of parishioners. Here are the Fair statistics:

50/50 raffle	\$1,933.25
Evergreens	\$4,601.00
What-Not Shoppe	\$2,312.75
Wine Wheel	\$1,020.00
Bakery	\$1,170.00
Candy	\$820.00
Raffle Baskets	\$10,843.00
Sewing & Knitting	\$1,593.00
Café	\$1,217.00
Festival of Trees	\$5,803.00
Silent Auction	\$5,826.00
Sponsors:	\$4,187.00
Total:	\$41,326.00

In addition to the dedicated committee members and volunteers, we would like to thank our most generous sponsors who supported the Fair: Knights of Columbus Council #330, Union St. Jean Baptiste #42/Catholic Financial Life, Dyer-Lake Funeral Home & Cremation Services, LLC, Sperry & McHoul Funeral Home, Lucy & Carlos Santos/Dunkin’ Donuts, the Welter Family, the Flynn Family, Nolan’s Flowers & Gifts, Bell’s Powder Coating, Inc., and Sirois Bicycle Shop, Inc. May God abundantly bless your generosity! ~Fr. Costa

Please Pray for our Deceased:

Ronald E. Rioux

Dillon E. Achin

Helen Brissette

Jonathan M. Kirby

H. William “Bill” Donnelly



*Eternal rest grant unto our beloved dead, O Lord.
Let perpetual light shine upon them.*

Winter Storm Mass Policy



As we face the unpredictable New England winter season, I share our Winter Storm Mass Policy.

Sunday Mass

Should there be significant snowfall or extreme ice conditions on a weekend, especially if we have been warned or “encouraged” to stay off the roads, weekend Masses will be celebrated **ONLY** at Saint Mark Church. We will follow the usual Mass times, but all Masses will be moved to Stanley Street because (1) I live on that property and the Dominicans would not be driving from Providence to be with us, and (2) only one property will need to be plowed and shoveled in time for Mass. Please note: when we are told to stay off the roads because it is too dangerous to travel due to weather conditions, any Mass obligation does not hold. **STAY HOME** for your safety and the safety of others. The Lord certainly understands!

Daily Mass

When school is canceled or delayed due to winter weather, the daily Mass is also canceled. If the delay is on a Tuesday, we will have Mass on Tuesday afternoon. If there is an early dismissal of school due to winter weather on a Tuesday, the daily Mass on Tuesday afternoon is canceled.

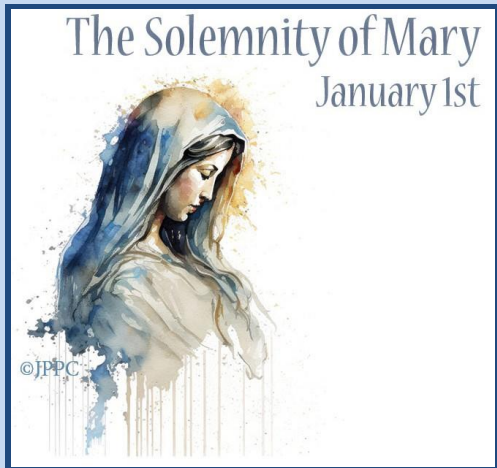
I hope these directives are clear. Thank you for your assistance and cooperation. If you have any questions, please call the parish office.

CONGRATULATIONS

©JPGC

Congratulations to parishioner, **Cheryl Allenchey**, who won the **50-50 Raffle** at our 2023 Christmas Fair! We are thrilled to report that Cheryl took home a prize of **\$1,933.25!** Thank you to everyone who helped make the 50-50 Raffle such a resounding success for our fair!

January 1: New Year's Day

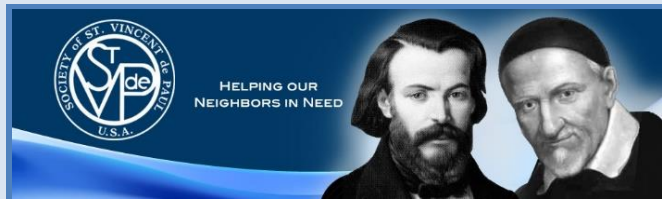


As January 1, the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, falls on a Monday this year, it is **NOT** observed as a holy day of obligation. We **WILL** celebrate Mass on Monday, **January 1**, at **9:00 am** in **Saint Mark Church**. The Mass will be live streamed.

Baptismal Preparation Classes Have Resumed

Parents requesting the baptism of their child should be registered members of the parish who attend weekend Mass here at Transfiguration of the Lord Parish on a weekly basis. Please pick up and complete one of the Parish Census forms if you have not already registered with the parish. If this is your first Baptism here at Transfiguration Parish, parents are asked to attend a brief baptismal preparation session. The next session will be held on Sunday, **January 14** at **12:30 pm** in the Sacred Heart Meeting Room. Advanced registration is required. Please call Martha at the parish office or email at stmaryna@noozi.com for more information.

Transfiguration of the Lord Parish Saint Vincent de Paul Society



Inspired by Gospel values, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a Catholic lay organization, leads women and men to join to grow spiritually by offering person-to-person service to those who are in need or are suffering, in the tradition of its founder, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, and patron, St. Vincent de Paul. The Society meets on the 2nd Thursday of the month in the parish hall in Saint Mary Church. Please join us!

Call for Assistance:

If you need assistance, please call the help line for our parish Saint Vincent de Paul Society. They can offer information about the types of assistance available. Please call 508-212-4755 for help or more information.

Faith Formation Program 2023-2024

Director of Religious Education ~ Mrs. Elaine Corvese
508-695-3823; transfigurationreled@gmail.com

Faith Formation Office hours:
Monday – Thursday: 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Class Schedule:

January 7th: **Grades 1 & 2**, 9:00 – 10:15 a.m.
(following the 8:00 a.m. Mass)

January 7th: **Grade 9**, 6:00 – 7:30 p.m.

January 8th: **Grade 7**, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

January 21st: **Grades 1 & 2**, 9:00 – 10:15 a.m.
(following the 8:00 a.m. Mass)

January 21st: **Grade 9**, 6:00 – 7:30 p.m.

January 22nd: **Grade 8**, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

Please see website: saintmaryna.com for the 2023-2024 calendar for all grades. Faith Formation classes are held at Saint Mark Church hall in Attleboro Falls.

Cancelation of classes: In the event of cancelation of classes due to inclement weather, the Faith Formation Office will notify parents/guardians by email and the cancelation notice will also be on the answering machine of the Faith Formation office at 695-3823. Please note: if the North Attleboro School Department cancels school, Faith Formation classes are automatically canceled.

PREPARE YOURSELF FOR THE COMING OF OUR
Lord Jesus Christ!

“Adopt-A-Family” An Advent Project



Transfiguration of the Lord Parish is once again sponsoring “Adopt-A-Family” as an Advent project. Organized by former State Representative Betty Poirier and many faithful assistants from parish organizations, families from North Attleborough are provided with much needed assistance. This project provides warm clothes for all family members and assistance with heat and necessary bills. “Santa” is also given a helping hand with his list for the children. Envelopes are available at all 3 churches through the weekend of **December 23/24**. We ask that you please make your donations payable directly to **Adopt-A-Family**. Thank you for your generous support of this annual project.

God Bless,
Debbie Fitzgibbons and Betty Poirier,
Adopt-A-Family Committee Members

SAINTS

SAINT MARY-SACRED HEART

Success Stories of SMSH Grads!



(left to right) Dylan Capua - SMSH 2019/ Bishop Feehan 2023, Stephen Capua- SMSH 2015/ Bishop Feehan 2019/ Providence College 2023 and Ava Mitchell - SMSH 2019/ Bishop Feehan 2023

Make SMSH part of your story! Witness the inspiring journey of three exceptional graduates from Saint Mary-Sacred Heart School, as they pave the way for a bright future. Stephen Capua, SMSH '15, attended Bishop Feehan High School and graduated from Providence College as a finance major. After these cousins graduated from SMSH 2019 and Bishop Feehan High School 2023, they went on to top notch colleges. Dylan Capua is a freshman at Brown University studying as a biochemistry/pre-med major and cousin, Ava Mitchell, is majoring in biomedical engineering at the University of Connecticut. Learn more about these remarkable Saint Mary-Sacred Heart School graduates in The Anchor at: <https://www.anchornews.org/index.php/2023/07/06/four-of-top-ten-bishop-feehan-high-school-graduates-are-from-st-mary-sacred-heart-school/>. These success stories exemplify the invaluable impact of a Catholic education at SMSH.

We cordially invite you to explore more about our school during our **Open House on Sunday, January 21, 12:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.** This event welcomes current SMSH families, as well as new and prospective families. We look forward to seeing you there!

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Saint Mary-Sacred Heart School Alumni:

Did you, your child, grandchild or other relative graduate from St. Mary's School, Sacred Heart School or Saint Mary-Sacred Heart School? If so, please go to the Saint Mary-Sacred Heart School website www.smshschool.com and under the Alumni tab fill in the form on reconnect with SMSH. We appreciate your support in this important part of our school's history!

PAJAMA DRIVE SUCCESS!

Happy News for Saint Mary-Sacred Heart School!

"Let's keep doing good and sharing with others, for these sacrifices please God." - Luke 6:30

We have successfully concluded our SMSH Pajama Drive with an amazing collection of **365 pairs of pajamas**. Mrs. & Mr. Ryan, with the help of the members of NJHS and student council, loaded up cars with over 20 boxes to deliver to Christmas is For Kids/Attleboro. We deeply appreciate the support and participation of our school community in this meaningful service project. Together, we are making a positive impact on the lives of children in need.

We also want to give a special congratulations to **Sierra** in Grade 4, the winner of the beautifully decorated Christmas tree!



Let's keep spreading the joy of our SMSH spirit every single day!! We invite you to discover more about our school's strong curriculum by visiting our website: www.smshschool.com.

Knights of Columbus Coat Drive: Thank You!



Thank you to all who donated to this year's drive! All donations will be given to the SVDP Clothing Center in Attleboro, which distributes clothing for free to those helped by our SVDP conferences here in North Attleborough and the surrounding communities. God bless you for your help.

Transfiguration of the Lord Respect Life Group

RESPECT LIFE

Monthly Meeting:

The next meeting of the Respect Life Group will take place on Thursday, **January 4, 2024 at 6:30 pm in Sacred Heart Church's Library**. We hope to see you there!



Saint Padre Pio once said:

"A thousand years of enjoying human glory is not worth even an hour spent sweetly communing with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament."

Please join us at **Saint Mark church** on Friday, **January 5th**, beginning at 9:00 a.m. and ending at 6:00 p.m. with Benediction. Remember, as we share in the work of Redemption, so will we be rewarded with our own redemption.

For more information call Joanne Regali (508-643-3821) or Arlene Hall (508-801-2243). Please leave a message if the call is not answered immediately.

Bulletin Submissions

Please note that due to anticipated delivery issues with FedEx during the entire 2023 holiday season, all transmission dates have been moved up by our publisher. Anyone wishing to submit a notice should email it as early as possible and include the dates you would like the notice to appear. It will be published in the earliest weekend available.

Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Tilma of Blessed Juan Diego



The miraculous image produced on the apron or tilma of Blessed Juan Diego is rich in symbolism. The aureole or luminous light surrounding the Lady is reminiscent of the "woman clothed with the sun" of Rev. 12:1. The light is also a sign of the power of God who has sanctified and blessed the one who appears. The rays of the sun would also be recognized by the native people as a symbol of their highest god, Huitzilopochtli. Thus, the lady comes forth hiding but not extinguishing the power of the sun. She is now going to announce the God who is greater than their sun god.

Our Lady of Guadalupe: Symbolism of the Image

The Lady is **standing upon the moon**. Again, the symbolism is that of the woman of Rev. 12:1 who has "moon under her feet". The moon for the Meso-Americans was the god of the night. By standing on the moon, she shows that she is more powerful than the god of darkness. However, in Christian iconography the crescent moon under the Madonna's feet is usually a symbol of her perpetual virginity, and sometimes it can refer to her Immaculate Conception or Assumption.

The **eyes** of Our lady of Guadalupe are looking down with humility and compassion. This was a sign to the native people that she was not a god since in their iconography the gods stare straight ahead with their eyes wide open. We can only imagine how tenderly her eyes looked upon Blessed Juan Diego when she said: "Do not be troubled or weighed down with grief...Am I not here who am your Mother?"

The **angel** supporting the Lady testifies to her royalty. To the Meso-American Indians only kings, queens and other dignitaries would be carried on the shoulders of someone. The angel is transporting the Lady to the people as a sign that a new age has come.

The **mantle** of the Lady is blue-green or turquoise. To the native people, this was the color of the gods and of royalty. It was also the color of the natural forces of life and fecundity. In Christian art, blue is symbolic of eternity and immortality. In Judaism, it was the color of the robe of the high priest. The limbus or gold border of her mantle is another sign of nobility.

The **stars** on the Lady's mantle shows that she comes from heaven. She comes as the Queen of Heaven but with the eyes of a humble and loving mother. The stars also are a sign of the supernatural character of the image. The research of Fr. Mario Rojas Sánchez and Dr. Juan Homero Hernández Illescas of Mexico (published in 1983) shows that the stars on the Lady's mantle in the image are exactly as the stars of the winter solstice appeared before dawn on the morning of December 12, 1531.

The **color** of the Madonna's dress is rose or pale-red. Some have interpreted this as the color of dawn symbolizing the beginning of a new era. Others point to the red as a sign of martyrdom for the faith and divine love.

The **gold-encircled cross brooch** under the neck of the Lady's robe is a symbol of sanctity.

The girdle or **bow around her waist** is a sign of her virginity, but it also has several other meanings. The bow appears as a four-petaled flower. To the native Indians this was the *nahui ollin*, the flower of the sun, a symbol of plenitude. The cross-shaped flower was also connected with the cross-sticks which produce fire. For them, this was the symbol of fecundity and new life. The high position of the bow and the slight swelling of the abdomen show that the Lady is "with child". According to Dr. Carlos Fernández Del Castillo, a leading Mexican obstetrician, the Lady appears almost ready to give birth with the infant head down resting vertically. This would further solidify her identification with the woman of Rev. 12 who is about to give birth.



The 4th Sunday of Advent – December 24, 2023

READINGS FOR THE WEEK



First Reading

A reading from the second Book of Samuel

When King David was settled in his palace, and the LORD had given him rest from his enemies on every side, he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God dwells in a tent!" Nathan answered the king, "Go, do whatever you have in mind, for the LORD is with you." But that night the LORD spoke to Nathan and said: "Go, tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: Should you build me a house to dwell in?'"

"It was I who took you from the pasture and from the care of the flock to be commander of my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you went, and I have destroyed all your enemies before you. And I will make you famous like the great ones of the earth. I will fix a place for my people Israel; I will plant them so that they may dwell in their place without further disturbance. Neither shall the wicked continue to afflict them as they did of old, since the time I first appointed judges over my people Israel. I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also reveals to you that he will establish a house for you. And when your time comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will make his kingdom firm. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever."

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.



Responsorial Psalm for Advent

Liturgical Note:

On the four Sundays of Advent, the Church gives us a Common Psalm for the Season. For each of these weeks, we will sing the following setting of Psalm 25:

R. To you, O Lord, I lift my soul, to you, I lift my soul.

To You, O Lord

Psalm 25

Psalm I for Advent

Marty Haugen



English translation of the Refrain from the Lectionary for Mass, copyright © 1969.
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Second Reading

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters:

To him who can strengthen you, according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages but now manifested through the prophetic writings and, according to the command of the eternal God, made known to all nations to bring about the obedience of faith, to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever.

Amen.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation

R. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.
May it be done to me according to your word.*

R. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

† A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke
Glory to you, O Lord.

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

"Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.



FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Hope:

Christian hope addresses the present. It does so in a round-about way. The hope-filled person is serene right now, right here, not because he or she possesses the wisdom and power to sustain the world, but because God does. The hope-filled person knows this through and through.

Comment:

Initially, David may have thought that power to sustain the word lay within him. David was, after all, the highly successful king of Israel. Were he a present-day general, there would be no end of decorations on his uniform, so stunning was his military history. The first reading is set at a time when David is at the pinnacle of his success as king of Israel. Peace reigns, the Ark of the Covenant—the dwelling place of God—is in the capital city, the people prosper. David, who has done so much for his people, thinks aloud how he will do something for God. He hits upon the idea of building God a fitting dwelling. This is not what God has in mind, however. It is not David's business to take care of God, Nathan reminds him. Rather it is God's business to take care of David and more, far more than David could dream of, much less hope for. For David was talking about a dwelling, a temple. And less, a temporal temple.

David's seemingly generous musings are met by God's huge promise. No less than eight times God reminds David that God is the source of strength, triumph, success. This is all God's doing. Therein lies the possibility for hope. And David knows it. At the end of God's "I" statements, we read that David will not build God a house, but rather God will build David a "house," a kingdom that will stand firm forever. And this kingdom begins in a small house in the out-of-the-way village of Nazareth. A messenger of God comes with a greeting of joy and a plea for the young woman not to be afraid. The young woman engaged to the carpenter Joseph of the house and family of David is a child of her generation and of all the generations before her. Like so many of the people of Israel, Mary trusted that God would fulfill promises and act on their behalf. Mary's questions were not based on incredulity, but on hope. She asked about the next step; she did not doubt that God would act and lead. Understandably, she needed to know how God would act, what God would do to fulfill the promises kept close and dear through Israel's long history. Without pretense or presumption, Mary's awareness of God's will for her dawned as gently as morning, and she welcomed God's future and her place in it: "Let it be done to me as you say."

Paul's words to the Romans assure us that the promise made to David has been accomplished in the person of Jesus the Christ. The unlikely virgin of tiny Nazareth became the fitting dwelling place of the One who would dwell among us and whose kingdom would endure forever. This is all up to God, in whose life these singular lives are lived. It is God's will and way that grounds the hope that David learned and Mary knew.

Reflection:

Today's readings, especially the Gospel, speak to our hope—our trust that God will fulfill promises. That hope is precisely what gets us off the eternal cycle of hopelessness that shows up in our worrying, fearing, fretting, and stewing. If we think that everything depends on us, then hopelessness is often an appropriate response. But it does not depend on us. Our lives depend on God, and this is the good news that spurs us on. We can set this whole thing in God's hands, whatever the "thing" is.

Then we can roll up our sleeves and get on with it, just as Mary got on with it. She went to take care of her cousin Elizabeth. She could go on with her life because her life was in God's hands, not hers. This hope left her hands free to reach out and help whoever needed help. So hope enables us to live and act in the present, where God is and where our neighbor is.

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Reflections for the Week beginning Sunday, December 24, 2023

Sunday, Dec 24, 2023

An embarrassment of riches

Every so many years, we experience this happy collision of observances: the last Sunday of Advent blossoms into Christmas Eve in a single day. Which means next week, the Feast of the Holy Family will roll into the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God by nightfall. It's a mad scramble for presiders, preachers, choirs, and liturgists to keep up with the whole, holy mess of these occasions. Parishioners too will be obliged to untangle the remarkable Mass schedule this landslide of liturgies creates. Consider it a cheerful reminder that liturgy gathers us into mysteries that are not finite but everlasting.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

TODAY'S READINGS: 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38 (11). *"Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God."*

Monday, Dec 25, 2023

The wonder of it all

In the early church, Christmas was actually not a major feast, but over the centuries it grew in importance, and Saint Francis of Assisi catapulted its popularity in 1223 by creating the first nativity scene in a cave with live animals. Christmas Midnight Mass was celebrated there and it was a huge hit with the whole town. The tradition of the Christmas crèche was born. Francis loved Christmas, considering it the "Feast of Feasts," because God chose to take the humble form of a poor baby. Let the wonder of the Incarnation imbue your day.

SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD (CHRISTMAS)

TODAY'S READINGS: Vigil: Isaiah 62:1-5; Acts 13:16-17, 22-25; Matthew 1:1-25 (13); Night: Isaiah 9:1-6; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14 (14); Dawn: Isaiah 62:11-12; Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:15-20 (15); Day: Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18 (16). *"For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord."*

Tuesday, Dec 26, 2023

For the love of Saint Stephen

On this second day of Christmas, consider words about true love—and Saint Stephen—from Saint Fulgentius, a North African bishop of the sixth century: "Love was Stephen's weapon by which he gained every battle, and so won the crown signified by his name. His love of God kept him from yielding to the ferocious mob; his love for his neighbor made him pray for those who were stoning him." Celebrate the Christmas octave with the same steadfast love the first Christian martyr showed his persecutors.

FEAST OF STEPHEN, FIRST MARTYR

TODAY'S READINGS: Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59; Matthew 10:17-22 (696). *"They could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke."*

Wednesday, Dec 27, 2023

Through thick and thin

Beloved! That's what we know about today's saint—John the apostle is the "disciple whom Jesus loved." John was the last apostle to leave Jesus at the cross and one of the first to discover his Resurrection on Easter Sunday. He earned the title of evangelist by writing the fourth gospel (likely with help from his

followers). His account of Jesus' life has a more spiritual and mysterious air than those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But that doesn't mean he's otherworldly—after all, John is the patron saint of loyalty and friendships. Honor him today by visiting with a friend.

FEAST OF JOHN, APOSTLE, EVANGELIST

TODAY'S READINGS: 1 John 1:1-4; John 20:1a, 2-8 (697). *"What we have seen and heard we proclaim now to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us."*

Thursday, Dec 28, 2023

Mortal consequences

Amid the Christmas festivities, today the church has a somber reminder of the infants in the vicinity of Bethlehem who were slaughtered by King Herod in his fruitless effort to destroy Jesus. They were "collateral damage" that paved the way for Christianity, a faith that confesses to protecting the most vulnerable. In honor of the Holy Innocents, we might consider the many innocents who die prematurely because of lack of healthcare, pollution that results in disease, and isolation that leads to early death. Strive to be a force for life.

FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS, MARTYRS

TODAY'S READINGS: 1 John 1:5—2:2; Matthew 2:13-18 (698). *"God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all."*

Friday, Dec 29, 2023

The Catholic bucket list

Gift-giving at Christmastime is a common custom. Whether it's at home under a lit tree or at the secret Santa party at work, it's fun to give and receive. "Experience" gifts are becoming more a part of this custom: tickets to see a ballgame, an art class, a hiking trip. Experience gifts can be given any time, and we can even treat ourselves. Since it's the season of Christmas, let's think of Catholic experiences that we'd enjoy and create a kind of "Catholic bucket list." See the pope? Run a food pantry? Visit Assisi? Take a scripture class? Spend the rest of the Christmas season creating your own list.

FIFTH DAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

TODAY'S READINGS: 1 John 2:3-11; Luke 2:22-35 (202). *"It had been revealed to [Simeon] by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord."*

Saturday, Dec 30, 2023

What is the purpose of life?

This age-old question has as many answers as there are questioners. For Catholics though, there is one simple answer: love. But when is love ever simple? Deep love can be complicated and even gut-wrenchingly hard. It can bring pain, longing, disquiet, questioning, loneliness, and sacrifice. Yet, "The pain that comes from deep love makes your love ever more fruitful," writes Henri Nouwen. Love is our purpose, and we join with those celebrating Kwanzaa who are reflecting this day on the principle of Nia, that is, purpose.

SIXTH DAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

TODAY'S READINGS: 1 John 2:12-17; Luke 2:36-40 (203). *"Whoever does the will of God remains forever."*

Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow—a day at a time



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