



December Newsletter

Saint Joseph Parish School of Religion

During the four weeks of Advent, we prepare for the celebration of Christ's birth through prayer, reflection, and family traditions. We light Advent wreaths and keep Advent calendars. We contemplate the First Coming of Jesus as Savior, and anticipate his promised Second Coming. And amid the flurry of Christmas preparations and the stress that invariably comes with the end of the calendar year, we look for practical ways to observe the holiness of the season in our everyday lives.

We will once again take part in our Advent Service Project which will benefit *Be Concerned*, a program based in Covington that helps low income families. *Be Concerned* is in need of H.U.G.S. (hats, underwear, gloves and socks) to distribute to their families this winter. We are asking that students in each grade level buy one item as it is broken down below and bring their item to the Christmas Brunch Potluck on December 16th. Items do not need to be wrapped. We ask that you buy the same size your child wears, unless they are assigned to buy adult socks. Then we ask that you buy your own size. We have 93 students enrolled in PSR this year and we would really like to be able to donate 93 items to help our community neighbors. 100% participation is the only way we can do this. During this Advent season think about how much your family has been blessed this past year and do this small, simple act to show others that they have not been forgotten during this hectic holiday season.

- **Grade One and Five: Underwear**
- **Grade Four and Seven: Hats**
- **Grade Three and Eight: Gloves or Mittens**
- **Grade Two: Socks for children**
- **Grade Six: Socks for adults.**

For all of those that donated to our Thanksgiving Project – thank you! *Be Concerned* was so grateful for everything that we collected for them.

Disciple of Christ,
Steven M. Fischer
Coordinator of Religious Education

Happy Birthday

| | | | |
|-----------|-----------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Jared S. | Dec. 2 nd | Seamus S. | Dec. 2 nd |
| Andy N. | Dec. 6 th | Kelsey G. | Dec. 7 th |
| Ashley S. | Dec. 17 th | Rob F. | Dec. 21 st |
| Erin H. | Dec. 21 st | Natalie H. | Dec. 27 th |
| John M | Dec. 28 th | Meghan W. | Dec. 28 th |
| Erin B. | Dec. 29 th | | |

Advent amid the Gift Wrap by Tom McGrath

"Are you ready for Christmas?" asked a guy I see at the train station every day. I thought of the long list of gifts I still needed to buy and the calendar crammed with holiday events and parties, and I shook my head. "Hardly," I said, and we both laughed knowingly.

On my train ride downtown I turned off my iPod and let my mind ponder that question a little deeper. "Am I ready for Christmas?" This time I thought about the meaning of the holiday—the Son of God coming to earth to dwell among us and show us the way to eternal life. Again I shook my head and murmured to myself, "Hardly."

It was then that I vowed to take advantage of every opportunity to prepare my heart for the coming of the Christ Child into the world—the world you and I live in.

What I discovered was that if we know what we're preparing for, everything we encounter on the way to Christmas can prepare us for the coming of Christ, not only in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago but also into our homes, our families, our workplaces, and our communities. The usual December distractions can instead become holy moments when we find the Christ Child in our midst.

Having the right attitude and perspective on the season will help you and your family avoid the excesses that make certain Christmas preparations frantic, yet draining and disappointing. As theologian John Shea says, "The task seems to be the delicate one of learning to make the customs and traditions of Christmas serve the Spirit."

Take a look at some of December's demanding activities with new eyes, eyes that fully expect to find God in every moment of this season of hope.

Tom McGrath is the author of [Raising Faith-Filled Kids](#).

Important Dates to Remember

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| December 2 | Class, Reconciliation Service |
| December 9 | Class, Reconciliation Service (Report Cards go out!) |
| December 16 | Ministries 9:30 Mass, Christmas Brunch Potluck (Memorial Hall) (Report Cards need to be signed by parents and returned.) |
| December 23 | No Class, Christmas Break |
| December 30 | No Class, Christmas Break |
| January 6 | Class Resumes |

Celebrating
**THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF
THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**

Feast Day: December 8th



The Immaculate Conception is a Catholic dogma that asserts that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was preserved by God from the stain of original sin at the time of her own conception. Specifically, she was filled with grace by God, and she lived a life completely free from sin. It is commonly confused with the doctrine of the virgin birth, though the two deal with separate subjects. Mary was conceived by normal biological means, but her soul was acted upon by God (kept "immaculate") at the time of her conception.

The formal active essence of original sin was not removed from her soul, as it is removed from others by baptism; it was excluded, it never was in her soul. Mary was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin at the first moment of her animation, and sanctifying grace was given to her before sin could have taken effect in her soul.

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary had been established in 1476 by Pope Sixtus IV who stopped short of defining the doctrine as a dogma of the Catholic Faith, thus giving Catholics freedom to believe in this or not; this freedom had been reiterated by the Council of Trent. The existence of the feast was a strong indication of the Church's belief in the Immaculate Conception, even before its 19th century definition as a dogma.

The Immaculate Conception was solemnly defined as a dogma by Pope Pius IX in his constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*, published December 8, 1854 and it became a feast of the Roman Catholic Church and consecrated by Pope Pius XII in 1942.

The Roman Catholic Church believes the dogma is supported by scripture (e.g. her being greeted by Angel Gabriel as "full of Grace"), and by the writings of many of the Church Fathers, either directly or indirectly, and often calls Mary the Blessed Virgin (Luke 1:48). Catholic theology maintains that since Jesus became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, she needed to be completely free of sin to bear the Son of God, and that Mary is "redeemed 'by the grace of Christ' but in a more perfect manner than other human beings".

In the Catholic Church, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on 8 December is generally a Holy Day of Obligation, and a public holiday in countries where Catholicism is predominant. Prior to the spread of this doctrine, December 8 was celebrated as the Conception of Mary, since September 8 is the Feast of the Nativity of Mary. It is a public holiday in Austria, Costa Rica, Chile, Spain, Italy, Ireland, and Malta.



The Magnificat - The Canticle of Mary

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden, for behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm: He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He has sent empty away. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy; As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to His posterity forever. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen

Family Connection

To be chosen by God for a particular task is an awesome thing. That is why we honor Mary, the one chosen by God to be the mother of Jesus. Yet we believe that each of us is chosen by God in particular and important ways, and each of us is given gifts and talents by God to share with the world. One of the tremendous responsibilities of parenting is helping our children determine the gifts and talents they have to share with others to serve the reign of God.

As a family, identify some of the gifts and talents that God has given each person in the family. Talk about the ways in which these gifts and talents might be used in the service of others. Recall that Mary was given a special task by God. Read together today's Gospel, Luke 1:26-38. Reflect upon Mary's humble response to God's call. Pray as a family that each person will be like Mary and respond to God with a resounding yes by using their gifts and talents to serve others in both large and small ways. Conclude by praying together the Hail Mary, or perhaps pray a decade of the Rosary, reflecting upon the Joyful Mystery, the Annunciation.

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Saint Nicholas, Bishop of Myra

The real story of 'Santa' goes back to a fourth century Christian saint named Nicholas. Nicholas was Bishop of Myra. He had a great heart for the poor and courageously pursued justice. One story tells

how Nicholas heard that three innocent men had been handed over to some soldiers to be executed. He ran to the site, grabbed the executioner's sword and freed the men. Another story tells how, when Myra was in the grip of famine, Nicholas convinced sailors on route to Egypt to share their wheat cargoes with the people. Not only were the people fed, but the wheat cargoes were miraculously replenished. Nicholas was not the shy, retiring type. When confronted by the notorious heretic Arius, Nicholas slapped him in the face! Offended by this breach of decorum the emperor threw Nicholas into prison. It is said that in prison Nicholas was visited by Jesus and the Virgin Mary who brought him the Book of the Gospels and his bishop's stole. Many icons in the Eastern Church depict this scene.

From the Bishop to 'St Nick'

Over the centuries, as 'Nicholas' stories and devotions spread, the saint's image became more gentle and benign. He was portrayed as a compassionate friend to children, leaving fruits, nuts, cookies and sweets in shoes and stockings on the eve of St Nicholas' Feast Day which is December 6th. In fact, the shape of

the candy cane is meant to reflect the bishop's crozier (shepherd's staff) which Nicholas carried. In the middle ages the figure of Nicholas was often accompanied by a devil-like character to symbolise the choice between good and evil. Like Nicholas, people were inspired to offer little gifts and acts of kindness to each other in secret, seeking nothing in return. The practice of giving Christmas baskets to those in need is also a St Nicholas custom.

From St Nick to the American 'Santa'

In nineteenth century New York a number of popular writers and artists began depicting St Nicholas as an elfin Dutch figure who smoked a clay pipe and brought gifts down the chimney. However it took a 1930s Coca Cola advertising gimmick to give the American Santa image the mass appeal we are so familiar with today. For 35 years Coca Cola was sold using the life-size, plump, jolly, red-suited, cherry-faced, white-bearded, Santa figure. He appeared in magazines, posters and shops all over the country encouraging Americans to enjoy Coke to quench 'a thirst for all seasons'. Santa was now an icon of contemporary commercial culture! So there you have it. 'Santa Claus' as we know him evolved from a fourth century Bishop, a courageous man of faith and a friend of the poor. Today the original saint is increasingly attracting attention from people in search of the spiritual dimension of the festive season.

Source: St Nicholas Centre: www.stnicholascenter.org
This is a delightful website for rediscovering the 'Real' Santa Claus, including Nicholas stories, prayers, recipes and children's activities. Worth a visit this Christmas!

NATIVITY WORD SEARCH

H D T A H A R G D C S H T
E O E N E P A U H T A D F
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| JOHN | GLORIA | MARY | REJOICE |
| NAZARETH | INN | WISE MEN | BIBLE |
| AUGUSTUS | CENSUS | ELIZABETH | ZECHARIAH |
| MANGER | ANNA | CHRIST | FRANKINCENSE |
| GABRIEL | ADVENT | BETHLEHEM | JOSEPH |
| DAVID | SHEPERD | EGYPT | HEROD |

CHRISTMAS POTLUCK – DECEMBER 16TH

We will be doing the ministries at the 9:30 AM Mass, and for the first time our 1st Grader's will be part of the Children's Nativity with the Sunday Preschool program. Afterwards we will have our POTLUCK in Memorial Hall. Sign-up sheet will be in the office or email stjoepsr@hotmail.com. Drinks, cups, plates, napkins and silverware will be provided. Families can bring casseroles, fruit, desserts, doughnuts, etc.