

St. Leo The Great

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

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“MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR?”

"It's the most wonderful time of the year", er, uh, actually, no it's actually not. Make room for old scrooge here, but the way we have to prepare for the deadline that is Christmas may be many things, but 'wonderful' isn't really one of them. I may be the priest and pastor in this parish, but that spells busy for me like few other times of the calendar and Church year, with the exception of Holy Week and Easter. And let's face it, when the last Mass of Christmas Day is celebrated and the parishioners have wished one another and me a "Merry Christmas" for the thousandth time, then I will utter a sigh of relief, drag my weary bones over to the rectory for a quick bite to eat (of something that is not made of chocolate or sugary or decorated), and then it will be off to bed for a post-Christmas nap. *[This year is really the exception as Christmas happens to but rarely falls on a weekend. Next year Christmas day will be on a Monday forcing a hurried liturgical and practical rush from the Fourth Sunday of Advent to the celebration of Christmas within just a few hours.]* Each year as I follow this tradition, I do so by laying my head down on my pillow, getting right down to my serious winter, mid-afternoon slumber, only to find that while my eyes are closed my mind is still in full throttle and I can still see people coming towards me, faces smiling, with greetings coming from their Christmas cheered faces. Don't get me wrong, Christmas is wonderful, but really only when we get time to catch our breath and afford ourselves the ever-so-necessary luxury of being able to ponder the mystery that is Christmas itself - recalling the time when Jesus came.

Once a year it is good to ponder the time and event of Jesus' coming. The story itself is outrageous and unbelievable, especially when one stops to think that the Saviour was promised in all of human history, and that when he came it was in such a simple, humble fashion that human hearts and minds could scarcely believe it, let alone accept it. Yes, this was the way that God chose to come and save us - by sending His Son, Jesus to live among us. In fact, the story has become so familiar and common place in our Christian history that perhaps we don't really grasp how truly extraordinary it is.

- I mean, think about it, this story of God's will:
- God promises throughout salvation history that he will send a Saviour -someone outside of ourselves who could truly save us from darkness, sin and death
- the Saviour will be born among humans and will walk, talk, and live among them
- the one on earth through whom he will do this is a woman who has already been especially prepared for this task by being born herself, without sin, (an act of God alone), through the mysterious event we know as the Immaculate Conception.
- the woman, Mary, is a simple, peasant woman, a young Jewish girl really, who has great faith and faithfulness to God
- she is so poor that she only has doves to offer in the temple
- while she is in fact engaged to a man named Joseph, she is not yet married to him and has been saving herself for the time they will marry
- God sends an angel, Gabriel, which means "message bearer", to Mary to ask her if she will cooperate with God's plan of entering the world through her, though she be a

virgin. God does not command nor does God leave Mary out of the situation - God *asks* Mary!

- Mary gives her assent to God's will with her 'yes'; "Be it done to me according to Your will." For the first and last time in all of human history, a child is born of a virgin and for the first time a woman said 'yes' and became a mother at the same moment - Mary willed motherhood and by this same act of her will became a mother
- in the lives of Mary and Joseph, God takes care of all of the details, giving them just the information they need at each moment, which demands their trust and faith in God's unfolding plan
- God reveals to Joseph in a dream that he is to accept Mary's pregnancy because it is part of God's unfolding will
- Mary and Joseph are astounded at the way God chose to work through them and their part in the redemption of all humanity
- a census is called and requires that Mary and Joseph leave Nazareth and go to Bethlehem, even though Mary is close to giving birth to her child
- upon their arrival there is no place for them to stay and Mary and Joseph are forced to take shelter and refuge in a stable outside of the town
- she gives birth to Jesus amidst the cattle, the oxen, the lambs, bringing to birth and fruition God's desire to send the Lamb among us
- Wisemen, who had heard the prophecies of the coming King, had set out to follow the star which was to lead them to the place of the birth of the Messiah
- Shepherds, people with rather bad reputations, who lived among their flocks, also received the news of the birth of the Saviour by the angels and were given exclusive invitations to come and see the Messiah in the form of a tiny babe
- the Maji and the shepherds arrive at the manger scene and represent the two groups ever to be found around Christ: the Maji, who represent those who, while they possess human wisdom, know that they do not know everything, and the shepherds, who know that they really know very little about God - yet both groups invited to bow down before the newborn King
- the three wise kings bring with them strange gifts that would seem unbecoming a baby - gold, frankincense and myrrh. Yet they are richly and mysteriously symbolic gifts which would speak of the destiny of this tiny child of Mary:

Gold, because Jesus was a king, *the King*

Incense, because he was a Priest, yet a priest who would not offer a sacrifice outside of himself, but would offer his very self, his life-blood for the redemption of all humanity, and

Myrrh, a funeral spice, because this King and Messiah would die, not like all other worldly kings, but would by and through his dying save all in the Kingdom he came to establish - a Kingdom that would have no ending.

The scriptures tell us that Jesus grew in age, grace and wisdom, but so too did his parents, Mary and Joseph. They would continuously have unfolded before them the great and salvific will of God to save His people from their sins and to win for them the gift of eternal life.

I have always loved the song sung by the monks of Glenstall Abbey in Ireland called The Darkest Midnight. The words, with so much rich meaning and depth only convey half the beauty found when accompanied by the hauntingly beautiful music of the score. In the original lyrics there are three verses, but I have been able to find only the first and last on the internet. The missing verse speaks of God's saving will throughout history and how it has led to the news of the awaited Messiah. For what it's worth, here are the first and last verses for your reflection and edification.

The Darkest Midnight

**The darkest midnight in December
No snow nor hail nor winter storm
Shall hinder us for to remember
The Babe that on this night was born.
With shepherds, we are come to see
This lovely Infant's glorious charms.
Born of a Maid, as the prophet said,
The God of love in Mary's arms.**

**Ye blessed angels join our voices
Let your gilded wings beat fluttering o'er
While every soul set free rejoices
And everyone now must adore.
We'll sing and pray that he always may
Our Church and clergy, all defend
God grant us grace in all our days
A merry Christmas and a happy end.**

Of course, the remaining point of our Christmas recollection is to look back at what God has done through the mystery of the Incarnation, God taking on a human form in the Person of Jesus, and to view the birth of the Messiah in the context of Jesus' promise that HE WILL COME AGAIN! The news of the King's coming 2000 years ago brought fear and trepidation to those who were afraid of losing their tinsel crowns. They were people who lived in this world with a real sense that the world as they knew it was all there really was. That is why the very life of Jesus was threatened at its very beginning by Herod, though God would not allow Herod to have his way. Christ's coming again at the end of time, whenever that might be, should not be greeted with fear, lest we be living in this present world to suffer the same fate as the likes of Herod. Each Mass we celebrate finds the Eucharistic Prayer concluding with the Our Father. As we end our recitation of this powerful prayer of Jesus, the priest adds;

***"Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil
graciously grant peace in our days,
that, by the help of your mercy,
we may be always free from sin
and safe from all distress,
as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour,
Jesus Christ.
Blessed Christmas to all!***

Fr. Charles

MASS INTENTIONS – Jan 3 - 8, 2017

Tue, Jan 3	8:30 a.m.	Private Intention
Wed, Jan 4	7:00 p.m.	Frank Utrosa+ Stefan Sabala+
Thu, Jan 5	8:30 a.m.	Intention of Fr. Charles
Fri, Jan 6	8:30 a.m.	Jason Mercer+
Sat, Jan 7	5:00 p.m.	Ken Wesley+
Sun, Jan 8	9:00 a.m. 11 a.m.	Simone Mastrangelo+ Ernie Laton+

CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR'S MASS SCHEDULE

Christmas Eve <u>Sat, December 24th</u> 5:00 p.m. 8:00 p.m.	Christmas Day <u>Sun, December 25th</u> 9:00 a.m. 11:00 a.m.
New Year's Eve Day <u>Sat, December 31st</u> 5:00 p.m.	New Year's Day <u>Sun, January 1st</u> 9:00 a.m. 11:00 a.m.

**Incense will be used at all Christmas Masses.*

MERRY CHRISTMAS

The Parish Staff wishes you and your families a wonderful and joyful Christmas Season and a Blessed New Year. *Joan, Tom & Magda*

2017 OFFERTORY ENVELOPES

2017 offertory envelopes are available for pick up in the vestibule. Please write your name and address on envelopes for the first few weeks of 2017 to confirm your contact information.

DAILY MASSES

There will be no Daily Masses from December 27 until December 30.

PARISH OFFICE CLOSED

Please note that the Parish Office will be closed between December 23rd and January 2nd inclusive.

VOCATION SEEDS


We celebrate the birth of our Lord into our world; however, many have not received the birth of our Lord into their hearts. If Christ lives in your heart and you would like to help others discover the Lord, you may be called to be a priest, deacon, brother or sister. **Contact Fr. Chris Lemieux, Vocation Director, Archdiocese of Toronto at 416-968-0997 or email at vocations@archtoronto.org**




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