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

Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 21, 2014

“...our mission is to love as Christ loved
and to proclaim the Good News...”

from our Parish Mission Statement
Background on the Gospel

This Sunday we read the story of the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary about the birth of Jesus. This story is found only in Luke's Gospel. On this fourth Sunday of Advent, the liturgy shifts our attention from John the Baptist to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Both John and Mary serve as important figures for our reflection during the season of Advent; they both played instrumental roles in preparing the way for Jesus. Last week we reflected on John the Baptist's announcement that the Savior was among us, although not yet recognized. This week we reflect upon Mary's example of faith and obedience to God, traits which permitted her to receive the angel's message that God's Son would be born as a human person, as one of us.

We are familiar with the story of the Annunciation, and it is fitting that we recall how God announced the birth of Jesus as we make our final preparations for our celebration of the Incarnation. The angel Gabriel visited Mary, a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph. Mary greeted the angel's news with awe and wonder and asked how it could be possible that she could give birth to a child. In his reply, the angel Gabriel announced the seemingly impossible reality: the child to be born would be conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and would be God's own Son. The angel reported to Mary another miracle; her relative Elizabeth was also pregnant despite having been thought to be unable to have a child. Mary's response to the angel, which is called her fiat, is an example of complete faith and obedience to God.

The story of the Annunciation calls to our attention God's wondrous action in human history. God chose a human person to give birth to his Son so that all humanity would know God's salvation. Mary, already full of God's grace, was able to cooperate in this great plan for our salvation. Thus Jesus was born as one of us, fully human and also fully divine. This is the mystery we prepare to celebrate at Christmas, the mystery of the Incarnation. In the model of Mary, we pray that we will be people of faith who recognize God's saving plan for us and are able respond with obedience. Loyola Press.

Living the Gospel

God's whole plan of salvation is a perpetual annunciation. In this gospel, there are numerous “annunciations” beyond Gabriel's revealing to Mary that she would conceive “the Son of God.” Gabriel makes known that Mary is holy; that the child shall be named Jesus; that the kingdom of this Child would have no end; that this Child is “holy, the Son of God”; that Elizabeth has conceived; that “nothing will be impossible for God”; and that Mary is God's faithful and obedient handmaid. Indeed, perpetual annunciation is God's pattern of relating to us. How do we, then, relate to God? We do so by responding with a yes to God's annunciations in our own lives. God chooses to be known to us, names us holy, and desires that we be filled with God's Life. Our response, like Mary's, must be one of openness and full-throated yes to whatever God asks of us.

We have only a few days left before we celebrate Christmas, the mystery of God becoming human. Now is the time to rehearse our own yes to God by imitating Mary's faithfulness and obedience to God's annunciations. Perhaps we could consciously think of our holiday greeting to others as a way to make generosity and joy concrete. Perhaps we could take a few minutes out of our busy days to listen for God's word to us, say yes, and then put God's annunciation into action, “enflesh” God's Presence in the goodness of our own lives. God's annunciations are perpetual and beg from us a yes response. Will this Christmas be a time to renew our own commitment to say yes to God and God's offer of salvation? ©Living Liturgy.

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Rite of Dismissal

From now through Lent, you will see at certain Masses our catechumens and candidates being dismissed from Mass with their catechist. Fr. Paul Turner, one of the leading theologians in the field of the RCIA writes, “Catechumens and candidates are dismissed not just because they are not yet eligible for Communion, but because they are not yet eligible to fulfill the tasks expected of all the faithful throughout the second part of Mass, “The Liturgy of the Eucharist.” The Liturgy of the Word is open to all because through the proclamation of the word by Lectors and the Priest and or Deacon (Gospel only) we are all instructed by God. Through our hearing of the word, we are all called to live it in our lives, thus catechumens and candidates belong with the gathered assembly for this first part of the Mass. Each week our catechumens and candidates will be called forward with their catechist at the end of the Liturgy of the Word, the General Intercessions. As they are sent forth they will spend more time talking and reflecting on the word of God we have just heard proclaimed in the scriptures and in the homily. During this dismissal the catechist will carry with them the Lectionary – the book that contains our scripture proclaimed at Mass.

Come, Lord God, shatter the darkness of our world with the light of your love. May these prayers we offer and our work to bring them to fulfillment bring the light and peace of the Messiah into our own time and place. We ask this in the name of our Hope, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Mary, in the midst of your life, you heard your call. In hearing it, you were told, “Do not be afraid.” (Luke 1:30). In the busyness of your life, God offered you an invitation. On one ordinary evening, you were able to say “yes.” What about me, Mary? Will I be able to hear God’s call in the midst of my life? Will God utter the same words of comfort delivered through another that the angel offered you? Will I be able to discern God’s voice from all the others offering me invitations? Will I be able to say “yes” to God’s invitation when it appears in the middle of my ordinary life?

Somehow your heart was tuned to the voice of God. Somehow the Holy Spirit enabled you to hear and say “yes” to what God put before you. While I do not understand it all, I do know that your ability to hear God through the angel Gabriel helps me know that I will be able to hear God speaking to me in the middle of my life. Your ability to say “yes” to something that frightened you at first helps me to say “yes” to the invitations God puts in my life that frighten me. You show me the way, Mary, to hear God’s voice, to overcome my fears, and to do God’s will.

In this season of Advent, when we celebrate your ability to hear God’s invitation and respond positively, I ask that you pray for us. Pray that we, too, may have hearts tuned to God’s voice. Pray that we might be comforted the way the angel Gabriel comforted you. Pray that we, too, can respond to God’s invitations in our lives so that we might continue to bring light into the world the way you did by offering us the greatest light, Jesus. Mary, Mother of God, pray for us.

- See more at: http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/20061/mary-you-show-me-the-way/comment-page-1/#comment-273976
Richard Rohr Meditation

We see that Mary is the archetype, the personification of the one who represents and sums up the entire mystery of how salvation is received, and this has many dimensions. Like Jesus, I believe she is a Corporate Personality, a stand-in and exemplar for all of us. This is why the older churches so honored her and were fascinated by her. She is us!

- The “immaculate conception” refers to her identity before she had done anything right or anything wrong (perhaps implied in Romans 8:30).
- Her free election at the Annunciation with no mention of merit (Luke 1:38), as it is for us.
- Her virgin motherhood is shrouded in mystery even for her (Luke 2:19, 51), as it is for us.
- She has a quiet, ordinary life (no statements for thirty years), as most of ours are.
- She shows heroic “standing” in dignity and solidarity with the pain and despair at the end (John 19:25).
- She demonstrates receptivity to the shared life of the Holy Spirit along with everybody else at Pentecost (Acts 1:14).

All of these dimensions point to the full meaning of how God is born into the world! It is never about us, and always about God. We, like Mary, are merely “handmaids,” instruments, and it took such a woman as this to make the whole pattern glaringly clear.

Let us learn from the Virgin Mary how to be bolder in obeying the word of God.

Pope Francis @Pontifex · Dec 8

Mary Receiving Jesus into Her Arms

The moment my son, Brady, was first placed into my arms everything changed. As I gazed into his tiny eyes, stroked his peach fuzz hair, and snuggled new life, I knew my life would never be the same. I knew my life would be consumed with loving him, and I knew, as I held him, that I would experience love in a way I had never experienced before. The very act of receiving my son into my arms for the first time changed my life.

Parents across the world understand the emotional moment of receiving our children into our arms for the first time. In an instant, something wells up from deep within us, and in a fleeting range of emotions we experience profound love for another, tremendous responsibility for another, and fear. When Abby, my daughter, was born and placed into my arms those same emotions arose—love, responsibility, and fear.

Advent prepares us for the birth of Jesus. On Christmas, we celebrate the act of Mary receiving Jesus into her arms for the first time—a moment that exemplifies “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14). Can we imagine the gaze between mother and child that day? Mary gazing into Jesus’ tiny eyes, stroking his hair, and snuggling the new life in her arms. Mary feeling the same profound love, tremendous responsibility, and fear that all parents experience. Jesus looking up at her. Jesus crying and needing to be soothed by his mother, the same way all newborns need to be soothed.

I know Mary was changed by Jesus’ birth. Advent prepares us for the Incarnation, when a little baby boy brought a light into his mother’s life that changed her life. Advent prepares us for the greatest reason for hope in this world—that this little baby boy brought light not only into his mother’s life that night, but that Jesus’ birth brought powerful light into our world.

By Becky Eldredge/Ignatian Spirituality. Used with permission.

Let us learn from the Virgin Mary how to be bolder in obeying the word of God.

Pope Francis @Pontifex · Dec 8
Reflection on the 4th Sunday of Advent: Anne’s Van

Years ago a journalist, Maura Rossi, did a story on Anne Donahue. Anne, a Georgetown University graduate, volunteered to work at Covenant House in New York City. This House which still exists today provides shelter for homeless runaways who have been forced to turn to prostitution for a living.

Every night at 10pm Anne and another volunteer put gallons of hot chocolate and bags of sandwiches into the Covenant House van. For the next couple of hours the van, with a dove painted on its door, tours the city’s juvenile prostitution areas. The volunteers simply offer free sandwiches and hot chocolate to runaways working the streets there.

You might ask yourself, what does Covenant House hope to accomplish by these nightly excursions? Anne answered the question this way: We’re out there because we know that a lot of kids haven’t tried Covenant House yet. About two-thirds have never heard of us. Anne went on to say that they accomplish something else too. Covenant House hopes to show these kids that somebody cares, that somebody is out there who’s neither buying or selling them.

Referring to her first year as a volunteer, Anne said: I was very depressed. What kind of God would let kids suffer so much?...Finally it got through to me...God’s not going to come down and show us his love. We have to let God’s love work through us.

Anne’s final two comments in the article are right on. First she said: God’s not going to come down and show us his love. God has already done this in the person of Jesus. That’s what Advent is all about. It’s preparing to celebrate this great mystery.

Second she said: We have to let God’s love work though us. When Jesus ascended to his Father after his life on earth, he commissioned us to continue his work. Just as the Father worked through Jesus during his life on earth, so Jesus taught us to let his Father work through us in our life on earth. We are called to be channels of God’s grace to others, just as Jesus was.

That is what Anne was doing driving her van through seedy areas of New York. She was serving as a channel of God’s grace to needy young people. She was doing what Mary did in today’s gospel She was saying yes to God’s invitation to be a vehicle of his love in today’s world. What Anne is doing and what Mary did, we must also do. We sometimes forget that if Jesus is to be born again in our world it must be through us. We sometimes forget that at some point in our life on earth God invites us to say what Mary said: I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.

Christmas is traditionally a children’s feast. It’s a time when we introduce children to the great mystery that Jesus brought God down to us. But we cannot stop here. If we do, we’ve told our children only half of the Christmas story. We must go a step further. We must teach them why Jesus brought God to us. It was to teach us that we, too, must bring God to others.

This is the greatest lesson in the world. It is the lesson Jesus taught us through his coming into the world. It’s the lesson that we must bring God to others just as Jesus brought God to us. It’s the lesson that we must bring God to others just as Mary brought God to us by her words to the angel in today’s gospel. It is the lesson we must learn and relearn each Advent and pass on to our children. It’s the lesson that other people will be giving to us this Christmas so that we, in turn, may learn to give it to others. That’s what Anne Donahue does each night as a volunteer in New York. That’s what Jesus did in his world. That’s what we must do in our world. We must pass this on to our children.

Excerpts used with permission. M. Link.
A Mother’s Reflection

Parenting is a job that at times can make me feel like the seams may rip open and all chaos will break out despite my best efforts to meet the needs of my three kids. There are nights I lay awake with worry about one of them and something he or she is facing. So often, I toss and turn as I analyze my actions as a mom that day, often begging Mary to pray for me and to help me be a better mom and to teach me how to love the ways my children need to be loved. I turn often to my faith and ask, What’s there that can help me? As a mother who is deeply passionate about the Spiritual Exercises, I’ve learned that Ignatian spirituality offers me three helpful lessons as a parent.

1. “Let the Creator deal directly with the creature.” (SE 15) Ignatius suggests this concept to people leading others through the Spiritual Exercises. There is much wisdom here for me as a mom. While I deeply love and care for my children, God loves them more. While I am always working on their behalf, God’s labor for them supersedes my own. I find comfort in knowing that God is dealing directly with my children the way I experience God dealing directly with me. When one of my children makes choices or decisions that worry me, I find comfort in knowing that God, too, is working on his or her heart.

2. We are active participants. As parents we are called to be active in our children’s lives. While God is dealing directly with our children, God is also trusting us, as parents, to be actively involved in the rearing of our children, to be passionate about loving them and helping them learn about God’s love for them, and to be diligent in teaching them right and wrong and how to make good choices. As parents, we have work to do, work that is our vocation. Parenting is not a passive role by any means! However, at times, we are called to participate simply by noticing, watching, or receiving what our children have to give the world. Sometimes all we can do as parents is to pray for our kids and participate in God’s unfolding work in their lives.

3. Jesus models the way. At the heart of the Spiritual Exercises is coming to know the person of Jesus and in so doing we learn how to live and love. Jesus models for me how to go about my job as a parent, even when it feels hard. Jesus went about his tasks with his Father’s help. Jesus carried his cross with God’s help. Jesus was deeply rooted in God, and he turned to God often. He prayed, and then he went about his task. That’s all I can do as a mom. In the middle of my tasks, I can stop, pause, turn my heart and mind to God, and then go about my day—changing diapers, nursing, running carpool, cooking meals, overseeing homework, doing laundry, and shuttling kids to and from activities. I can go to God often in my day, bringing the joys and worries and mundane tasks to God, and then focus again on living the beautiful vocation given me to be a mom.

I write this post as much for me as I do for other parents who will read this. I need these reminders during my sleepless nights or the days I question my ability to care for the three gifts God gave me in my children. These lessons of Ignatian spirituality bring me comfort and respite as I come to a deeper understanding that there are many things that I cannot handle alone, and therefore, I am utterly dependent on God.


Advent Wreath Prayer

Father, all-powerful God, your eternal Word took flesh on our earth when the Virgin Mary placed her life at the service of your plan. Lift our minds in watchful hope to hear the voice which announces his glory and open our minds to receive the Spirit who prepares us for his coming. We ask this through Christ our Lord. ~AMEN.

The family is a community of love where each of us learns to relate to others and to the world around us.
Pope Francis @Pontifex · Dec. 9
Thanksgiving Outreach News

Livestock for Life

Each year parishioners help our brothers and sisters at our Sharing Parish, Holy Cross, in Jinja, Uganda through the Livestock for Life Program. Your donation supplies a hen, goat or pig (and training) to a specially selected family. The animal provides income for the family and the church.

You may purchase a gift card on our parish website with your credit card or drop off a check with the form below to the Parish Center. Each gift is $40. You will receive your gift card in the mail.

Not sure what to buy this year? Check out Livestock for Life gifts.

Donate Stamps— Shoppers at Jewel Osco receive Saver Stamps that can be redeemed for Cuisinart cookware. Donate your Saver Stamps to help us earn cookware for new refugee families served by the Catholic Charities Refugee Resettlement Program in Chicago. Stamps may be dropped off at the parish center or the YC office.

Thanksgiving Day 2014

Parishioners and friends gathered on Thanksgiving morning to give thanks and praise to our Father of love and Lord of all creation. We are especially grateful to the Turano Family for donating freshly baked bread which decorated our altar and to our choirs who helped us raise our voices in prayer for our many gifts.

Your Name____________________________________
Phone _______________________________________
Address______________________________________
Email: _______________________________________
Number of Gift Cards ______  Amount Enclosed ______
Save the Date
SJC Women's Club Cooking Dine & Demo Evening featuring Parishioner, Dee Dee Saracco of Gravy Thursday, January 22, 2015 7:00-9:00pm

gravy*
*nana's sunday cooking, everyday!

Advent by Candlelight 2014
Win a Penthouse Suite for 20 at The United Center
Support our Early Childhood Playground

Chicago Bulls vs. Phoenix Suns
February 21, 2015

$100 per ticket
Buy your ticket early!
Only 300 sold!

Winner will be notified on January 9, 2015

Sponsored by The School Advisory Board

Questions or to Purchase Contact:
Jennifer Miller 708-246-4454 or miller@sjc.pvt.k12.il.us
Send check payable to SJC 708 51 Street Western Springs, IL 60558

St. John of the Cross Parish School is now accepting applications for the 2015-16 school year. St. John of the Cross Parish School provides a dynamic Catholic environment where faith is nourished and knowledge grows. We offer unique educational experiences that foster, success, promote unity, and respect the individuality of each student. If you are interested in visiting the school, please call Jennifer Jermano Miller, Director of Advancement at 708-246-4454, to set up an appointment or visit our website at www.stjohnofthecross.org/school

Serving Others

During the 7th grade year, students begin experiencing service opportunities while journeying to Confirmation. Service is a vital part of a Christian’s life, and our youth are blessed with many ways to give. During December, our 7th grade students attended a presentation about the importance of using our blessings and gifts to help others. Our guest speaker really touched the hearts of our 7th grade students and inspired all of us to be the hands of Christ for others. Check out SJC Facebook page for comments from parents on the speaker.

Check out the Family Home Lesson on YC website ~ Due in January.

YC Schedule

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Wonderful and eternal God, please give us a heart that can understand the mystery of your love for us. Put a spark of love in our hearts so that we may love your world. Amen.

Might the light and love of the newborn Jesus be in our hearts!

Youth Catechesis Office
The YC Office will be closed Dec 22 to Jan 2 ~ Merry Christmas!
Calendar of Events
December 22 - Kairos Christmas Party
January 2-4 - Frosh/Soph. Retreat Weekend

The Kairos retreat for Juniors and Seniors will take place March 19-22. Registration begins in January, so watch the website and bulletin for details.

Please pray for the teens going on the Frosh/Soph. Identity Retreat January 2-4, as they enjoy outdoor winter fun, reflection and prayer!

Get Involved!
Adult volunteers are needed to help out at our Spring events. Contact Recruiting Coordinator, Ann Smith, at 246-4047 to learn about the opportunities that are available.

Summer Work Tours & Conferences

Lord God,

We pray that our voices become one with the voices of all your sons and daughters, that our common prayer for peace may be the beginning of change that removes anger and hatred bringing your limitless love and unconditional forgiveness into our homes, our schools, our community, our nation and our world. We ask these things in the name of Jesus, love incarnate.

Amen.

We pray that our voices become one with the voices of all your sons and daughters, that our common prayer for peace may be the beginning of change that removes anger and hatred bringing your limitless love and unconditional forgiveness into our homes, our schools, our community, our nation and our world. We ask these things in the name of Jesus, love incarnate. Amen.

Learn more about opportunities to live out God’s call for all people to support justice and peace throughout the world. www.chicagopeaceandjustice.org
Parish News & Notes

Ecumenical Relationships Development
The ministers of the different churches in the Village are trying to build relationships between themselves and among their congregations. We are in the brainstorming phase of planning, trying to build off the October experience of sharing our histories. The meeting will be on January 13th from 3pm—4pm. If you have an interest in developing relationships with our fellow Christian brothers and sisters, please contact me. Whether you can make the meeting or not, I’d like to find some parishioners who have a particular passion for ecumenism. Let’s see what might be possible to share with one another. Fr. David

The Eucharist in Scripture
Little Rock Scripture Study Group
Beginning Monday, January 5th from 1pm-3pm for six sessions all are invited to study the biblical foundations of the Eucharist. Eucharist in Scripture emphasizes the importance of meals shared in faithful fellowship as part of our covenant relationship with God. Old Testament meals and promises provide the foundation for gospel meals with Jesus, culminating in the Last Supper as understood by Paul in Matthew, Mark and Luke. “Breaking bread” in Acts and the Bread of Life discourse in John are examined carefully. Class materials fee: $15.

Pope Francis and global religious leaders signed a statement at the Vatican condemning modern slavery on December 2nd. Locally, the Sisters of St. Joseph have highlighted liberating those enslaved by human trafficking as part of their mission. Go to the Sisters website (csjoseph.org) to find out more information and see how you might support this ministry. Following is the Universal Declaration Against Slavery.

We, the undersigned, are gathered here today for a historic initiative to inspire spiritual and practical action by all global faiths and people of good will everywhere to eradicate modern slavery across the world by 2020 and for all time. In the eyes of God, each human being is a free person, whether girl, boy, woman or man, and is destined to exist for the good of all in equality and fraternity. Modern slavery, in terms of human trafficking, forced labor and prostitution, organ trafficking, and any relationship that fails to respect the fundamental conviction that all people are equal and have the same freedom and dignity, is a crime against humanity. We pledge ourselves here today to do all in our power, within our faith communities and beyond, to work together for the freedom of all those who are enslaved and trafficked so that their future may be restored. Today we have the opportunity, awareness, wisdom, innovation and technology to achieve this human and moral imperative.

Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel.

- Isaiah 7:14

As this Advent season draws to a close, reflect on how Jesus has come to birth in you.

Upcoming Programs at The Well in LaGrange 1515 West Ogden csjthewell or call 708-482-5048

Mark your calendar to join us for the next two parish sponsored programs at The Well during the month of January. Both programs are free to our parishioners. Just call the parish center to register.

**From Dinosaurs to Star Trek:**
The Evolution of Hope for a Threatened Planet
Saturday, January 24, 2015 from 10am-Noon
Speaker: Pat Bombard, BVM
Pat holds a Doctor of Ministry from CTU and a MA in Religious Studies from Mundelein. She offers workshops and retreats on emerging trends in spirituality and leadership.

Some scientists speculate that an asteroid striking Earth ended the 160 million year reign of the dinosaurs. Today some say human-caused environmental destruction is the lead cause of Earth’s present great extinction. Do we have any better chance at changing the course of history than the dinosaurs? The answer to that question lies in the path of conscious evolution—a very personal journey from despair to hope that each of us can and must take. Together we will share stories of our learnings on the journey thus far.

**On a Clear Winter’s Eve...**
A Circle of Kindred Spirits Consider Slowing Time
Monday, January 26, 2015 from 7-9pm
Speaker Barbara Mahany
Barbara Mahany is an author and journalist with job experience as a reporter/writer at the Tribune and a pediatric oncology nurse at Children’s in Chicago. Her new book: Slowing Time: Seeing the Sacred Outside Your Kitchen Door, was selected as a top 10 religious book by Publishers Weekly.

Barbara Mahany explores Winter, the Season of Deepening. The long dark winter weeks, not long after the Nativity and then Epiphany, invite us to draw deeper inside this Ordinary Time, to begin anew, to spark a winter’s dream, to marvel in the quietude that the New Year brings. Blessings and lessons abound in these snow-blanketed weeks as we commit again to the dream of all who we can be. Together we will partake of that, and sip something warm, besides. Books will be available for purchase and a book signing.

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Volunteers Needed for Christmas Eve & Christmas Day

We are looking for parishioners who are willing to help us greet and welcome the many parishioners and visitors who will attend Mass at St. John of the Cross Parish on December 24 and December 25. Through the wonderful generosity of a parishioner, we will also be handing out a special Christmas gift book to every family: Walking with Pope Francis: 30 Days with the Encyclical The Light of Faith to inspire prayer and renewal. If you and members of your family would like to help out at the Christmas Mass you plan to attend, please contact MJ Martin or Elizabeth Russell-Jones today via email. We are putting together a schedule so we have each exit covered.

This simple gesture of welcome, wishing others a Merry Christmas and sharing a small, prayerful gift is a way to let the light of Jesus shine through you, bringing God to others.

mjmartin@stjohnofthecross.org
erussell-jones@stjohnofthecross.org
For many people the thought of Christmas brings fatigue. It’s not the religious aspect that causes the tiredness, but the overdrawn rituals that surround it: the overly decorated shops, the conscriptive shopping, the lights, the Santas, the Christmas trees, and the carols that begin to echo through our malls already in early November.

And so it is asked: What has all of this, or any of it, got to do with the birth of Jesus? Hasn’t Advent, which is supposed to be a time of preparation for the feast, become an exhausting ordeal that brings us to Christmas day already saturated with what we were supposed to be building up to? Wouldn’t we honor Jesus more if we spend the money we lavish on Christmas on the poor instead? Don’t our Christmas celebrations serve to obliterate our awareness of Jesus’ birth more than highlight it? Valid questions.

Our Christmas celebrations, admittedly, do start too early, are too-commercially driven, do focus too little on anything religious, and do not take the poor sufficiently into account. Too often too they serve to obliterate religious awareness rather than highlight it. And so it is easy to be cynical about the Christmas. It contains too many excesses.

However, with that being conceded, we need to be careful not to throw out the baby with the bath water – and that is more than a pun in this case. Because something is done badly does not mean it should be cancelled. What is called for, I believe, is not the cancellation of the tinsel, the lights, the socials, the food, and the drink that surround Christmas, but a better use of them. There are good reasons to cancel the rituals with which we surround Christmas, but there are even better reasons for keeping them.

What are those reasons? Why continue so many of these rituals when, almost invariably, they degenerate into excess and fatigue? Because we have a congenital need to celebrate, pure and simple. As human beings we have a healthy, God-given, genetically-encoded need to sometimes make festival, to have carnival, to celebrate an elaborate Sabbath, to park our prudence for a few hours, and to live life as if there wasn’t any reason to pinch our pennies or to be cold to our neighbors. Christmas is Sabbath, the supreme Sabbath.

There are seasons in life, and these should be on a regular cycle, that are meant precisely for enjoyment, for family, for friends, for color, for tinsel, and for good food and good drink, There is even the occasional time for some prudent excess. Jesus gave voice to this when his disciples were scandalized by a woman’s excess in anointing his feet with perfume and kisses.

All cultures, not least those who are economically poor, have times of festival where, explicitly or implicitly, they take seriously the words: The poor you will always have with you, but today it is time to celebrate. Christmas is such a time, meant for festival.

John Shea, in his now-classic book on Christmas, Starlight, tells the story of a family who decided one year to celebrate an alternative Christmas. They did not put up a tree, did not string up any lights, played no carols, and did not exchange gifts. They met for a simple, quiet meal on Christmas day. Asked by friends how it all went over, one family member replied that it “was pleasant”. Another member, perhaps speaking more honestly, stated that it was “an existential abyss”.

There is a God-given pressure inside of us that pushes us to celebrate and instills in us an irrepressible sense that we are not meant for poverty, gloom, and carefully measured-out relationships, but that we are meant ultimately for the feast, the dance, the place of lights and music, and the place where we don’t measure out our pennies and our hearts on the basis of having to survive and pay mortgages. The celebration of festival and carnival, even with their excesses, help teach us that.

Christmas is such a festival. In the end, its celebration is a lesson in faith and hope, even when it isn’t as strong a lesson in prudence.

To make a festival of Christmas, to surround Jesus’ birthday with all the joy, light, music, giving, energy, and warmth we can muster is, strange as this may sound, a prophetic act. It is, or at least it can be, an expression of faith and hope. It’s not the person who says: “It’s rotten, let’s cancel it!” who radiates hope. That can easily be despair masquerading as faith. No. It is the man or woman who, despite the world’s misuse and abuse of these, still strings up the Christmas lights, trims the tree and the turkey, turns up the carols, passes gifts to loved ones, sits down at table with family and friends, and flashes a grin to the world, who is radiating faith, who is saying that we are meant for more than gloom, who is celebrating Jesus’ birth.

RONROLHEISER, OMI
The Week Ahead
Monday, December 22, 2014
9:30am Spiritual Journaling
10:30am Christian Meditation Step 11
2:30pm Adoration
6:00pm Kairos Christmas Party
Tuesday, December 23, 2014
Wednesday, December 24, 2014
Thursday, December 25, 2014
Friday, December 26, 2014
Saturday, December 27, 2014
7:00am Christian Meditation
1:30pm Baptisms
Sunday, December 28, 2014
1:30pm Baptism Prep Session

Trying to get in touch with us?
More info is on our website: www.stjohnofthecross.org
Rev. David P. Dowdle, Pastor
ddowdle@stjohnofthecross.org
Rev. Joseph F. McDonnell, Pastor Emeritus
Contact Fr. Joe through the Parish Office
Rev. William J. Vollmer, Associate Pastor
bvollmer@stjohnofthecross.org
Deacon John Schopp
john.schopp@newhemispheres.com
Bill Bright, Director of Outreach Ministries
bbright@stjohnofthecross.org
Janet Caschetta, Director of Youth Catechesis
jcascetta@stjohnofthecross.org
Jim Clauer, Director of Worship
jclauer@stjohnofthecross.org
Laura Dragich, Reservations Coordinator
ldragich@stjohnofthecross.org
Kathleen Gorman, School Principal
gorman@sjc.pvt.k12.il.us
Katie Hayes, Director of Teen Ministry
khayes@stjohnofthecross.org
Jessica Koch, Director of Music
jkoch@stjohnofthecross.org
MJ Martin, Director of Parish Operations
mjmartin@stjohnofthecross.org
Elizabeth Russell-Jones, Welcome Coordinator
erussell-jones@stjohnofthecross.org

Parish Center Office Holiday Hours
As always, our priests can be reached in an emergency by calling the parish office number 708-246-4404 and following the voice prompts.

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Mass Intentions

Monday, December 22
7:45 Our Beloved Dead; Louis Trapp

Tuesday, December 23
7:45 Stephen Siedlaczek; John Joseph Wheelihan

Wednesday, December 24
7:45 George J. Zurowski; Margaret Cochran
4:00 John DenBesten; Dr. Norbert & Barbara Mann
4:15 Charlie Fields; Bruno Shukis
4:30 Elizabeth G. Purtell; James E. Purtell
6:00 John Joseph Wheelihan; Deceased members of the Parker-Weber Families
10:30 Lawrence Hickey; Joseph Scelsi

Thursday, December 25 Nativity of the Lord
7:30 John Callahan, Sr.; Michael & Frances O’Shea
9:00 Deceased members of Grogan & Galvin Families; Dr. Edward Montgomery
10:45 Deceased members of the Dowdle & McCarthy Families; Betty Scioli
12:30 Alice & Al Sobey; Chester, Walter & Patricia Cebula

Friday, December 26
7:45 Special Intention of the Rozsypal Family; Brigitte Rose Newman

Saturday, December 27
8:00 Brigitte Rose Newman; Victor Kwit
5:00 Robert Plechaty; Eileen Dempsey

Sunday, December 28 Feast of the Holy Family
7:30 Susan McGuire; Steve Zick
9:00 Jorge Paez; Matthew Flood; Larry Dougherty
10:45 Collette Durkin; Charles Sugrue
12:15 Francesco Brotto; Nellie DiPompeo
5:00 Joseph D. Kusper; David Barbour

Italics—Living

Pray for Our Sick
Bruno Armalas Larry Klinger
Rich Dastice Melanie Yates
Mike Delaney

Advent is a journey towards Bethlehem. May we let ourselves be drawn by the light of God made man.

PopeFrancis @Pontifex · Dec 21
Christmas Eve, Wednesday, December 24
7:45am Advent Weekday Mass

**4:00pm Church**  
*Children’s Choir, Carol Prelude 3:30pm*  
**4:15pm First Floor School Multi-Purpose Room**  
*Carol Prelude 4:00pm*  
**4:30pm Second Floor Gym**  
*Carol Prelude 4:15pm*  
**6:00pm Church**  
*Carol Prelude 5:45pm*  
**10:30pm Church**  
*Traditional Choir, Carol Prelude 10:00pm*

**Christmas Day—Thursday, December 25**
7:30am Church
9:00am Church  
*Contemporary Ensemble*  
10:45am Church  
*Traditional Choir*  
12:30pm Church  
*5 Alive! Teen & Young Adult Choir*  
This Mass begins 15 minutes later than usual.

There will be no 5:00pm Mass on Christmas Day.

At each Mass on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, music will be led by a cantor, organ, and/or piano and various instruments in addition to the choirs noted above.

**Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God**  
**New Year’s Eve and Day**  
**Wednesday, December 31 5:00pm**  
**Thursday, January 1 10:00am**

**Sacrament of Reconciliation**  
**Tuesday, December 16 7:00pm**  
**Parish Reconciliation Service**

**Saturday, December 20 at 8:30am**  
**Individual Reconciliation**

**Holiday Mass Schedule**  
We will have our regular weekend Mass schedule on Saturday and Sunday, December 27-28, the Feast of the Holy Family. Our regular daily Mass will be at 7:45am on weekdays and 8:00am on Saturdays.