



# Southwest Michigan Catholic

**Celebrating  
Christmas to  
Candlemas**



**Living the  
Sacraments**



**Making Parish  
connections**

**How one  
Catholic family  
charts their  
path to**

*holiness*







# Who will you be this year?

*“The Lord is coming, always coming.  
When you have ears to hear and eyes to see,  
you will recognize him at any moment of  
your life. Life is Advent; life is recognizing  
the coming of the Lord.”*

—Father Henri Nouwen



Getty Images/Boonyachot

Every year we enter this sacred season where we anticipate the birth of Jesus. And let's face it, it's hard to top Mary's birth story. The dramatic and uncomfortable journey bouncing along on a donkey while nine months pregnant. Being turned away at countless doors and settling for an environment meant for stable animals. Bringing God's son into the world amidst the lowliest of circumstances.

When you think about the major players in the Nativity story, whom do you emulate during the Advent and Christmas season?

Maybe you're really prepared and akin to the wise men: focused on the true meaning of the season and guiding your journey all the way to the manger.

Or maybe you're more like Joseph. He trusted in God's promise while caring for his family

despite all logic pointing to his situation as untenable.

Or maybe you're more a behind-the-scenes player like the empathetic and kind counselor Elizabeth — an adopted mother-mentor who radiated joy and peace throughout these hectic days, and calmly said, “it's all going to be OK.”

Most Advent seasons, I must admit, I feel most like the shepherds — unprepared, hapless, asleep on the job (with the job being preparing for the coming of the Lord). I, like the shepherds, need that dramatic sign, such as the angels, gently saying, “hey, wake up!” and triumphantly heralding the arrival of the Savior to jolt me into preparing my heart and mind.

Recently, I was preparing to host an event. I was meticulous in my planning. I checked and double

checked my to-do list, enlisted others to help me, ran through the day's agenda multiple times to troubleshoot the what-if's — standard event-hosting stuff. As everyone knows, it takes preparation to host an event — you can't just wing it and expect great results.

The same can be said for Advent. As the kick-off to a new liturgical year for the Church, it's a dedicated, penitential season where we ready for both the coming of the baby Jesus as well as his second coming. Fortunately, there are a host of resources, ideas and tools available (some within the pages of this edition) to help you.

So, who will you be this year? I may be a shepherd, but this year I'm striving to be one of the Magi. Won't you join me?

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! †



**VICTORIA CESSNA**  
is the Executive Director  
of Communications and  
Public Affairs for the  
Diocese of Kalamazoo  
vcessna@diokzoo.org



Photo by Victoria Cessna

15

### Cover Story

How one Catholic family charts their path to holiness

## FEATURES

- 10 **Faith-filled traditions**  
From Christmas to Candlemas and everything in-between
- 20 **Living the sacraments**  
Sacraments of healing



### ▲ Sacraments

Learn how to help hesitant kids go to confession on [page 23](#).



**I consider it a privilege to be asked now to accompany all of you in this local Church during this time of transition."**

Read about Bishop Bradley's new role in the Diocese of Steubenville, Ohio, on [pg. 25](#).



### ▲ Photo essay

Learn about the *Connecting with Our Parishes* event on [page 28](#).



4



6



8

## COLUMNS

- 4 **The Bishop's Perspective**
- 6 **Marriage Matters**
- 8 **Dear Father**
- 9 **Saint of the Month**
- 14 **Culture**
- 26 **Hispanic Ministry**

## PLUS

- 31 **Local News**





**MOST REVEREND  
EDWARD M. LOHSE,**  
fifth bishop of the  
Diocese of Kalamazoo

# FOR THE PEOPLE

*The angel said to them,  
“Do not be afraid;  
for behold, I proclaim to you good  
news of great joy  
that will be for all the people.  
For today in the city of David  
a savior has been born for you who  
is Messiah and Lord.  
And this will be a sign for you:  
you will find an infant wrapped in  
swaddling clothes  
and lying in a manger.”  
And suddenly there was a multitude  
of the heavenly host with the angel,  
praising God and saying:  
“Glory to God in the highest  
and on earth peace to those on  
whom his favor rests.”*

(LK 2:10-11)

## DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

**D**uring these past months since my ordination and installation as your bishop on July 25, I have enjoyed numerous opportunities to meet many of you in our parishes, schools and in the community. I have met youth and young adults at their gatherings and have confirmed many young people at the cathedral. I have visited the different religious communities of sisters in their convents and religious houses and spent time with the Knights of Columbus. I have had the chance to celebrate Mass at some of our Catholic schools, with the Knights of Columbus, and with the graduates of the Instituto San Agustin (ISAK). And I have participated with the broader Christian community at ecumenical events.

Throughout all of this, I have been inspired by your witness to the Gospel and to Christ. While our challenges may seem numerous, I am confident that, with the help of God's grace, we will grow stronger together in our mission to spread the Good News.

While one of my roles as a bishop is to get to know the people entrusted to my care, another privileged responsibility I have is to pray for each and every one of you. In fact, the duty of a pastor (“pastor” is the Latin word for “shepherd”) to offer Mass for his people arises out of the very nature of his office and the duty of the shepherd to pray for the flock. In a tradition dating back as far as the second and third century, and still required today, the diocesan bishop, and indeed, all pastors, offer Mass each Sunday and holy day of obligation for the people (in Latin, *pro populo*) entrusted to them. You can be assured that as I celebrate Midnight Mass, I will happily be offering that Christmas *pro populo* Mass for you and those who are dear to you.

May the Lord bless you and your family in this joyous season of Advent and fill your Christmas season with grace. May the splendor of the newborn Christ Child fill your home with his light. †





# PARA LA GENTE

*El ángel les dijo:*

*“No teman,  
porque les traigo una buena noticia,  
una gran alegría para todo el pueblo:  
Hoy, en la ciudad de David,  
les ha nacido un Salvador, que es el Mesías, el Señor.  
Y esto les servirá de señal:  
encontrarán a un niño recién nacido envuelto en pañales  
y acostado en un pesebre».*

*Y junto con el ángel, apareció de pronto una multitud  
del ejército celestial,  
que alababa a Dios, diciendo:*

*“Gloria a Dios en las alturas,  
y en la tierra, paz a los hombres amados por él”.*

LUCAS 2:10-14

## QUERIDOS HERMANOS Y HERMANAS EN CRISTO,

**D**urante estos últimos meses desde mi ordenación e instalación como su obispo el 25 de julio, he disfrutado de numerosas oportunidades para conocer a muchos de ustedes en nuestras parroquias, escuelas y en la comunidad en general. He conocido a jóvenes y adultos jóvenes en sus reuniones y he confirmado a muchos jóvenes en la catedral. He visitado las diferentes comunidades religiosas de hermanas en sus conventos y casas religiosas y pasé tiempo con los Caballeros de Colón. He tenido la oportunidad de celebrar Misa en algunas de nuestras escuelas católicas, con los Caballeros de Colón y con los graduados del Instituto San Agustín (ISAK). Y he participado con la comunidad cristiana en general en eventos ecuménicos.

En cada evento, me ha inspirado su testimonio del Evangelio y de Cristo. Si bien nuestros desafíos pueden parecer numerosos, estoy seguro de que, con la ayuda de la gracia de Dios, juntos nos fortaleceremos en nuestra misión de difundir la Buena Noticia.

Si bien una de mis funciones como obispo es conocer a las personas confiadas a mi cuidado, otra responsabilidad privilegiada que tengo es orar por todos y cada uno de ustedes. De hecho, el deber de un pastor de ofrecer la Santa Misa por la comunidad surge de la naturaleza misma de su oficio y del deber del pastor de orar por el rebaño. En una tradición que se remonta a los siglos II y III y que se mantiene hoy en día, el obispo diocesano y, de hecho, todos los párrocos ofrecen misa cada domingo y días de precepto por el pueblo (en latín, pro populo) que se les ha confiado. Pueden estar seguros de que, al celebrar la Misa de Gallo, ofreceré con todo el corazón, la Misa pro populo de Navidad por ustedes y sus seres queridos.

Que el Señor los bendiga a ustedes y a sus familias en este feliz tiempo de Adviento y llene de gracia su tiempo navideño. Que el esplendor del niño Jesús recién nacido llene sus hogares con su luz. †



DON'T SKIP ADVENT —  
CREATING NEW

# *seasonal traditions*

FOR YOUR FAMILY



**SOCORRO TRUCHAN**  
is the Associate Director,  
Domestic Church, for the  
Diocese of Kalamazoo.



I remember our first Christmas in our new home. We had very little in the way of material goods, yet we were very excited to see how we would prepare for the coming of the Divine Child Jesus on Christmas Eve. Throughout the years, we adopted various Advent traditions to keep our focus on the true meaning of Christmas.

One year we set out to make a Jesse Tree with hand-made ornaments. The children were young, and the activity both kept them busy and punctuated the true meaning of this season. The Jesse Tree is a beautiful Advent devotional that many Catholic families use during the season of Advent. The ornaments symbolize the ancestry of Jesus and how all his ancestors played a role in salvation history.

Another tradition we began was to pray a Christmas novena together as a family. Because one of our children was born on Dec. 16, the starting day for a Christmas novena, we celebrated one birthday on the 16<sup>th</sup> and continued celebrations leading up to the birth of Jesus with a full-blown birthday party on Christmas Day singing songs of worship and praise: *O Come let us adore Him!*

We also began a custom of placing the empty wooden manger beneath the Christmas tree in anticipation of placing the baby Jesus in it on Christmas day.

One year the children made birthday cards for baby Jesus, and with the permission of our parish priest, they brought them to church and placed them at the foot of the manger. The children were so proud to deliver their custom-created cards for baby Jesus.

My beloved Tony and I grew up in different worlds and have learned to share our family traditions with one another. He is Ukrainian Catholic, and I celebrated Christmas mostly with Mexican heritage traditions. For example, in Mexico, it is customary to prepare a hearty family dinner on the night of Dec. 24, whereas in the Ukrainian Christmas Eve it is customary to forgo meat for the meal. This has made for some creative menus over the years to honor both traditions.

Even now, as our children are grown, every year when we gather, we remember the many times that even though we may have had very little materially, we were blessed in abundance through the Advent customs we created together.

## Christmas Novena

*Divine Infant, Jesus,*

*After the wonders of Your birth in Bethlehem,  
You wished to extend Your infinite mercy to the whole world by  
calling the Wise Men through heavenly inspiration to Your crib,  
which was in this way changed into a royal throne.*

*You graciously received those holy men who were obedient to  
the divine call and hastened to Your feet. They recognized and worshiped  
You as the Prince of Peace, the Redeemer of mankind,  
and the very Son of God.*

*Show me also Your goodness and almighty power.  
Enlighten my mind, strengthen my will, and inflame my heart  
to know You, serve You, and to love You in this life,  
that I may merit to find my joy in You eternally in the life to come.*

*Jesus, most powerful Child, I implore You again to help me:  
[mention your request].*

*Divine Child, great omnipotent God, I implore through Your most  
Holy Mother's most powerful intercession and through the  
boundless mercy of Your omnipotence as God,  
for a favorable answer to my prayer during this Novena.*

*Grant me the grace of possessing You eternally  
with Mary and Joseph and  
of adoring You with Your holy angels and saints.*

*Amen.*

*The Christmas Novena is traditionally prayed for nine days starting  
either on Dec. 16 or on Christmas Day.*

## “TIS THE SEASON” — try these fun ways to celebrate Advent

### CREATE

an Advent wreath  
with greens, candles  
(3 purple and 1 pink)

### BLESS

your Christmas tree  
after decorating it with  
a family prayer service

### CREATE

(or find) an Advent  
playlist to listen to in  
the car and at home

### PRAY

the 0 Antiphons from  
the Liturgy of the  
Hours in the eight  
days leading up to  
Christmas.

### CELEBRATE

one of the  
Dec. Saint Feast  
Days (e.g., Our  
Lady of Guadalupe,  
St. Lucy) †



# A devotion to our Catholic faith



Photography by John Grap

## Q MY PARENTS ARE INSISTING ON BEING BURIED IN A CATHOLIC CEMETERY. WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

**A** It might seem a little strange, but I like to wander through cemeteries occasionally. Not just any cemetery I come across (that would indeed be a little strange) but ones where family members, friends, or people whose funeral I celebrated have been laid to rest. It's also interesting to find old graves and to sometimes pray for someone who hasn't been prayed for in a long time. In Catholic

cemeteries, I might look for priests who are buried there — whether I knew them or not — and remember they are a brother priest who, we pray, has gone home to the Lord.

In early Christianity, it was very important to people to be buried alongside those who shared the same belief. This was especially important to Catholics. All we must do is look to the ancient catacombs where Catholics were always buried together.

While we don't call modern graves "catacombs," it really isn't a stretch to think of our Catholic cemeteries in a similar way. Looking at the ancient catacombs, we find that graves were inscribed to help identify a person along with other inscriptions or images that described a person's life or beliefs. We do something similar on tombstones today. And there is something special about being buried alongside those who worshiped together during life. Death is part of our journey to new life, and it is appropriate that we accompany our Catholic brothers and sisters when we are called home by God.

The grounds of a Catholic cemetery have been consecrated; it is "holy ground."

Mt. Olivet Catholic Cemetery, Kalamazoo, holds an annual Memorial Day Mass. Shown above holding the wreath is George Dragan, Lieutenant Colonel, United States Marine Corps Reserve.

That isn't to say, of course, a final resting place in a non-Catholic cemetery is wrong. Hopefully, a grave in a non-Catholic cemetery has been appropriately blessed at the time of a person's interment (or inurnment). But a Catholic cemetery encourages Catholic prayer and devotions unique to our time-honored faith.

When a cemetery is blessed, these or similar words are said, which sum up the importance of a Catholic cemetery: "Lord God, Father



Stop in and shop our great gift selection, find the perfect Christmas gifts for children and adults!

🎁🎁🎁 Shop local for the Christmas season 🎁🎁🎁

## NEWMAN'S BOOKSHOPPE

THE CATHOLIC  
INFORMATION CENTER

Books • Movies • Music  
• Statues • Crucifixes  
• Artwork  
• Jewelry • Cards  
• Games • Puzzles  
• Advent wreaths

340 East Michigan Ave. — downtown Kalamazoo  
Mon-Fri: 9 am – 6 pm • Sat: 10 am – 4 pm • Phone: 269.553.0482  
[www.newmansbookshoppe.com](http://www.newmansbookshoppe.com)

Free parking in front of the store on both sides of Michigan Ave.

FIRST IN SAVINGS **ZEMCLICK** FIRST IN SERVICE

[www.zemlick.com](http://www.zemlick.com) • 269-375-4000



Everything for the Workplace.

“

**The Catholic cemetery encourages Catholic prayer and devotions that are unique to our time-honored faith.”**

of everlasting glory, solace of the sorrowing, life of the just, glory of the lowly, we humbly importune you to keep this cemetery free from any vileness of unclean spirits, to cleanse and to bless it, and finally to give lasting wholeness to the bodies brought here for burial. And at the end of time, when the angels sound their trumpets, let all who have received the sacrament of baptism, who have persevered

in the Catholic faith until death, and who have had their remains laid to rest in this cemetery, be rewarded in body and in soul with the unending joys of heaven; through Christ our Lord.”

As we consider where our final resting place will be, we should keep in mind the sacredness of a Catholic cemetery. Who knows, someone might wander past our grave and say a prayer for us, too. †



**FATHER JOHN FLECKENSTEIN**  
is the Pastor of St. Joseph Catholic Church, St. Joseph

SAINT OF  
THE MONTH



## St. Olympias

[361-408] | FEAST: DEC. 17

St. Olympias might have come from a very wealthy family in the early days of Constantinople, but this disciple of St. John Chrysostom was orphaned and widowed, and she still managed to serve God and the poor with unwavering charity despite setbacks.

After being orphaned, Olympias was raised by her nanny under the supervision of her uncle. She eventually married the prefect of Constantinople who died shortly thereafter, leaving Olympias a childless widow uninterested in remarriage.

Olympias declined all new marriage proposals, devoting herself instead to serving God, performing works of charity and eventually being consecrated as a deaconess of Constantinople. Her parents had left her with a great fortune, and she soon built a convent next to the principal church of Constantinople, where many women consecrated themselves to God and service to the poor. She also built a hospital and orphanage.

St. John Chrysostom became Bishop of Constantinople around this time and served as a spiritual guide for Olympias. From that point on, Olympias followed St. John Chrysostom's direction, helping even the most distant regions of the empire with her donations. When St. John was exiled, Olympias remained a faithful disciple and refused to accept his successor. Because of this, her convent was disbanded and her charitable works were put to an end.

St. John Chrysostom encouraged and guided Olympias in her own illness, persecution and exile until his death. Shortly thereafter, Olympias, too, passed from this life, and she has been venerated as a saint ever since. Her statue is in the colonnade of St. Peter's Square. †

ART BY MATT WATTERS

[diokzoo.org](http://diokzoo.org)



# FROM CHRISTMAS TO CANDLEMAS

*and everything in between*

BY SARAH DEMOTT

**E**very year as the Advent season rolls around, the great debates of when Christmas begins and ends pick up. Should you wait to put up Christmas decorations until Christmas Eve? Or perhaps you roll them out slowly over the Advent season. Do you take them down the day after Christmas or Epiphany or the Baptism of our Lord or not until Candlemas? Following are some ways to honor the season all the way until Candlemas on February 2, 2024.





## Octave of Christmas | Dec. 25 – Jan. 1st

Technically, the Christmas liturgical season does not begin until the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord, which is Dec. 25. This marks the beginning of the Octave of Christmas, an eight-day celebration that concludes on the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, on Jan. 1.

### ■ HOW TO CELEBRATE:

Don't let your Christmas celebrations end on Dec. 25. Listen to Christmas Carols like "Silent Night" and "Joy to the World." Read your favorite Christmas stories and continue making delicious Christmas treats as you continue to celebrate the newborn Jesus.

There are also several feasts during these eight days: St. Stephen, the first martyr on Dec. 26; St. John the Apostle on Dec. 27; The Holy Innocents on Dec. 28; St. Thomas Becket on Dec. 29; and the Holy Family on Dec. 31.

And as you approach the New Year, spend time as a family coming up with ways you can celebrate your faith more, along with other family goals, throughout the coming year.



## Epiphany | Jan. 7, 2024

But then there's Epiphany, when we celebrate the three wise men bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the baby Jesus. While Epiphany is traditionally observed 12 days after Christmas (on Jan. 6), in the United States we celebrate it the Sunday after Jan. 1. This year we celebrate the Solemnity of Epiphany on Jan. 7.

### ■ HOW TO CELEBRATE:

Perhaps the most well-known Epiphany observance in the United States is home blessing. Many parishes will provide blessed chalk after Christmas for families to use to write "20+C+M+B+24," representing *Christus mansionem benedicat*, which means "Christ, bless this house," or the names of the three wise men, Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar.

Another fun way to observe Epiphany is to send the wise men in your nativity on a journey. Keep the wise men put away until Christmas Day. Then bring them out and move them to new spots in your house each day until they finally reach the stable on Epiphany. You can also sing "We Three Kings" each day.

In some cultures, it is common for immediate families to wait to exchange gifts until Epiphany, to commemorate the wise men bringing their gifts to the Christ child.

A traditional Epiphany treat is the King's Cake. It changes form depending on the cultural recipe, but it is usually a sweet circular cake. It often has a bean, tiny doll or plastic baby Jesus hidden inside or a crown placed on top.







## Baptism of our Lord | Jan. 8, 2024

According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), the Christmas season officially ends at the feast of the Baptism of our Lord, held the Sunday after Jan. 6. Because our Epiphany celebration falls on a Jan. 7 this year, the Baptism of the Lord will be celebrated on Monday, Jan. 8.

### ■ HOW TO CELEBRATE:

One way to honor the feast of the Baptism of our Lord is to remember our own baptisms. Bring out your baptismal candles and refill your holy water fountains. Wear white and recite your baptismal promises. Parents can start the habit of blessing each child with holy water every day. Mark each of your baptismal anniversaries on your family calendar for the year. If you are a godparent, spend time praying for your godchild(ren) and think of ways you can help support their faith life this year.

Also, since the Baptism of our Lord is the first luminous mystery of the rosary, consider praying that decade or all the luminous mysteries as a family (see sidebar pg. 13).

A traditional symbol of baptism is a shell, so consider making some kind of shell dish for dinner — shellfish or stuffed shells, perhaps. Or for something simpler, pick white foods as a reminder of our white baptismal garments.







## WHAT ARE THE LUMINOUS MYSTERIES?

The Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary, or the “Mysteries of Light,” as they are sometimes called, were added by St. Pope John Paul II in October of 2002 at the start of the Year of the Rosary, in his apostolic letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, or “The Rosary of the Virgin Mary.”

According to St. Pope John Paul II, the addition of these mysteries of light helped to more fully represent the entirety of the Gospels as meditations on “certain particularly significant moments in his public ministry, following reflection on the Incarnation and the hidden life of Christ (the joyful mysteries) and before focusing on the sufferings of his Passion (the sorrowful mysteries) and the triumph of his Resurrection (the glorious mysteries).”

He also noted, “It is during the years of his public ministry that the mystery of Christ is most evidently a mystery of light: ‘While I am in the world, I am the light of the world’ (Jn 9:5).”

### The Luminous Mysteries:

- The Baptism in the Jordan
- The wedding feast of Cana
- The proclamation of the kingdom of God
- The Transfiguration
- The institution of the Eucharist

## Candlemas | Feb. 2, 2024

Perhaps lesser known, the Feast of the Presentation, or “Candlemas,” occurs every year on Feb. 2. It celebrates Mary and Joseph bringing Jesus to the temple when he was 40 days old to make an offering thanking God for their son. As we hear in the Gospel of Luke, when Simeon saw them enter the temple, he knew Jesus was the promised Messiah and said:

“Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.” (Lk 2:29-32)

It is from this canticle, calling Jesus “a light for revelation,” the name “Candlemas” is inspired, and this is the day the priest brings out the new candles for the year and blesses them. At many parishes the faithful are invited to bring their own candles in for a blessing on this day, and some even hold candlelight processions as part of the blessing. It’s another great moment of hope and joy for our faith.

This connection of Jesus as light can also be found several times in the Gospel of John:

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (Jn 1:5) and “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.” (Jn 1:9)

“Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” (Jn 8:12)

Mary and Joseph presenting Jesus to God in the temple is also a foreshadowing of the sacrifice he would make on the Cross, a great reminder that even through the darkest of circumstances (like the Crucifixion), God can bring forth light (like the Resurrection).



### ■ HOW TO CELEBRATE:

Consider purchasing a special candle(s) to reserve for times of prayer in your house and have them blessed on Candlemas. Keep them on your family altar or another special place where they can be seen as a reminder to spend time daily in the beauty and peace of personal and family prayer. Light them also on special occasions like the celebration of baptism anniversaries and patron feast days.

Candlemas falls on Groundhog Day. An old English saying may hint that Candlemas marks the first Groundhog Day: “If Candlemas be fair and bright, Come winter, have another flight. If Candlemas bring

clouds and rain, Go winter, and come not again.” This makes sense because Feb. 2 marks the midpoint of winter. The focus on candles can be a reminder that the gray days of winter won’t be around forever and that the light is to come, a great mindset to enter into as we head into the dark days of Lent and the light days of Easter.

The traditional food of Candlemas is crepes. In France they often host crepe flipping contests to celebrate Candlemas. Consider hosting your own contest at home (even if you use pancakes instead of crepes). Consider eating your crepes (or another meal) by candle light or lighting your entire house by candle all day. †



# The Candlemas Connection

**If Candlemas be fair and bright,  
Come winter, have another flight.  
If Candlemas bring clouds and rain,  
Go winter, and come not again.**

**T**HOSE ARE THE WORDS OF AN OLD ENGLISH POEM THAT HELPED INSPIRE A TRADITION THAT TAKES PLACE HERE IN THE UNITED STATES EVERY FEB. 2, DATING BACK TO 1887. ON GROUNDHOG DAY, THE FATE OF SPRING IS DETERMINED IN THE QUIANT TOWN OF PUNXSUTAWNEY, PA. IF THE GROUNDHOG, “PUNXSUTAWNEY PHIL,” SEES HIS SHADOW, IT MEANS SIX MORE WEEKS OF WINTER. AND IF NOT, WE’RE IN FOR AN EARLY SPRING!

And while thousands gather near Gobbler’s Knob, the small hill where the ceremony takes place, millions of people across the Atlantic in France celebrate Feb. 2 by feasting on crepes for what they call

Crêpe Day, or La Chandeleur. What do these traditions have in common? Like many secular holidays recognized on the modern calendar, Groundhog Day and La Chandeleur both have a Christian connection. That’s right, if it wasn’t for Mary and Joseph bringing their infant Son Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem, neither would exist!

Feb. 2 marks the final day

of the 40-day Christmastide season and is the feast of the Presentation of our Lord, or Candlemas Day. Forty days after Christ’s birth, Mary and Joseph, following Mosaic law, brought Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem for the rites of purification and dedication. The Gospel of Luke describes the scene: “When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.” (Lk 2:22)

While at the Temple, Simeon, a “righteous and devout” man, gave his prophecy about Christ being a light to the Gentile nations and alluded to his crucifixion. Since around the seventh century and in acknowledgment of Simeon’s prophecy, the faithful would host a special procession and blessing of candles during Mass on this day, hence the name “Candlemas.”

That celebration, associated with Simeon’s prophecy evolved into both Groundhog Day and La Chandeleur. In France, La Chandeleur has also come to be known as “Crêpe Day,” as the customs of the celebration have morphed over time and now include the consumption of crêpes. And in the United States, German settlers in Pennsylvania blended the Christian Candlemas holiday with other superstitions, which held that a hedgehog (they had hedgehogs instead of groundhogs where they came from) could predict weather, manifesting in the quirky tradition of Groundhog Day.

I suspect most casual observers of either holiday are not aware of the Christian origins of the festivities of Feb. 2 — it wasn’t until recently

that I learned about it. But it does make me think differently about the news report that arrives each year revealing the outcome of Groundhog Day and how much more winter it portends. And I’m willing to bet that delicious crêpes would bring cheer to me or anyone, especially if Punxsutawney Phil does predict a longer winter!

## French Crêpes

- 1½ cups flour
- 3 eggs
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 2 cups whole or 2% milk
- 3 tablespoons butter melted
- Butter (for coating the pan)

In a blender, combine all ingredients and blend on medium-high speed (or pulse) until completely emulsified. Cover batter and let rest for 20 minutes. The batter can also be stored in an airtight container in the fridge overnight.

Heat a small amount of butter in a 9- or 10-inch frying pan over medium to high heat. Pour ¼ cup of batter into the pan. Tilt the pan to spread batter as thinly and evenly as possible. Cook for about a minute, or until the bottom is light golden brown in areas. Gently lift edges and flip with a spatula. Cook the other side for an additional 10-20 seconds, or until light golden brown in areas. Repeat process for remaining batter. Serve warm with your favorite fillings! †



**MICHELLE SESSIONS DIFRANCO** is a designer and the busy mom of three children.



"THE WELFARE  
OF THE FAMILY IS  
DECISIVE FOR THE  
FUTURE OF THE  
WORLD AND THAT  
OF THE CHURCH."

—POPE FRANCIS  
*AMORIS LAETITIA*, #31

How one  
Catholic  
family  
charts their  
path to

*holiness*

BY VICTORIA CESSNA

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY  
OF AMY MCNAMARA



The McNamara house is bursting with energy this Sunday afternoon. The family has already been up early to get to 8 a.m. Mass and Mom and Dad have successfully checked off two mealtimes — breakfast and lunch. The oldest child, sits before the TV, mesmerized by Sunday football as he recuperates from a recent tonsillectomy, while his younger brothers spar over toys one moment and then erupt into collective giggles when one lands a pretzel right in the other's forehead.

Tim and Amy McNamara are like many young couples today who are juggling the demands of their professional lives while raising young children. Tim is the Director of Religious Education at two parishes (St. Martin of Tours in Vicksburg and St. Philip in Battle Creek), and Amy is a social worker for St. Augustine Cathedral School. Married in 2014, their family has grown to include their three sons: Davey, 8; Ollie, 5; and Micah, 2 (as well as their child "Baby Chip" in Heaven). To their families and friends they are known for their infectious smiles as well as their inspiring joy and love for the Church. So how do they find time for each other and for their sons all while maintaining focus on their shared ministry to be the primary educators of the faith? With hearts centered on prayer, connection with their communities and a heaping dose of humor and humility.

## *Where it all began*

Neither Tim nor Amy could have predicted the intersection of their adult lives. Tim was finishing his degree at Western Michigan University (WMU) with an eye to working in education. Amy was on a path to serving others as a social worker, and while she is also a WMU graduate, she didn't meet Tim in college. It wasn't until years later when Tim was a diocesan seminarian and Amy was figuring out post-college life while working at a doctor's office that their paths crossed. They met while volunteering for St. Thomas More Student Parish's migrant ministry program.

"I remember my mom calling me and telling me about this wonderful young man she met," laughs Amy. "I also remember saying, 'that's great mom, but he's a seminarian.' She said, 'well, yeah, but you guys could be great friends — he's just so nice.'"

Amy soon agreed with her mom's assessment of Tim, and the two did become good friends. So good, in fact, Amy remembers complaining to Tim about a particularly challenging relationship and Tim commiserating with her. In that moment Amy realized she had developed deep feelings for Tim and had to let him know.

"I wrote him a letter," she remembers. "I just knew that if I didn't let him know how I felt, then I would someday regret it."

Tim's reaction?

"He called me — which I thought was very mature. We had a great conversation, and he said he appreciated my letter but still felt called to serve God and continue to discern the priesthood."

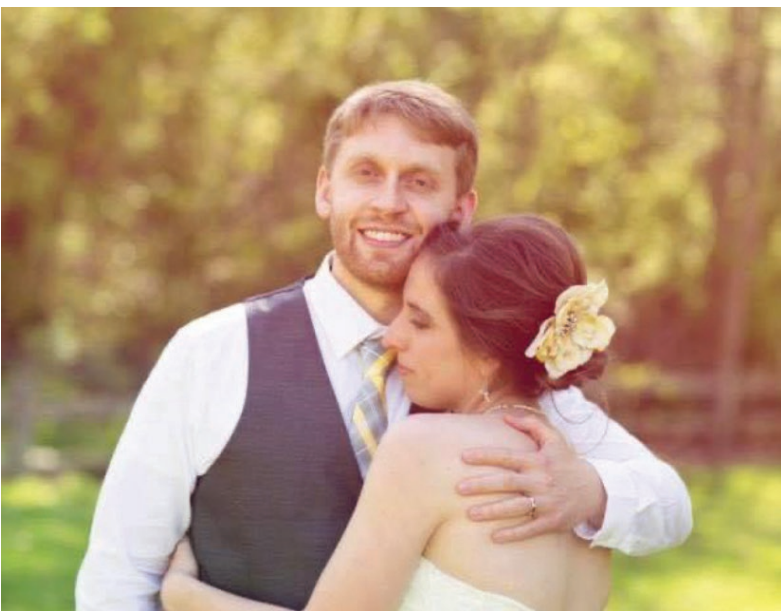
Meanwhile Tim, as he describes it, "soldiered on through seminary." Just a few weeks before his ordination to the transitional diaconate, he was waiting for a meeting with his Spiritual Director at the seminary.

"I remember sitting in the waiting room focusing on this beautiful photo of Jesus surrounded by little children and thinking to myself, 'Oh, I can do this — sure — I can power through.'"

During the fateful meeting that followed, Tim's advisors delivered the news that they were recommending Tim wait to be ordained. They didn't feel he was quite ready to move forward.







“I had this amazing sense of immediate peace,” Tim said.

Fast-forward to July of 2011, and Tim had just accepted a job as Director of Religious Education at St. Martin of Tours Parish in Vicksburg. Coincidentally, at the same time Tim was at the church to accept his new position, Amy stopped by the chapel at St. Tom’s, something she admits she really didn’t do.

“For some reason I was compelled to be with God and express my desire to let go of this man. I asked God to give me the peace to deal with whatever was to happen.”

It was in that moment of prayer that her phone rang.

“If you’re still looking for a boyfriend, I have someone in mind,” said the caller. “He’s unemployed and living with his parents, but he has potential.”

That caller was Tim.

Their relationship continued to grow and, not surprisingly, was rooted in prayer and service to the Church — whether that was continuing with migrant ministry or chaperoning

youth groups. Amy, meanwhile, was also on the path to fulfill her dream of studying and working in Ireland. It was during a visit there she embarked on the Croagh Patrick — a hike where pilgrims are encouraged to go barefoot just as St. Patrick did.

At the end of the hike, the couple had another Holy Spirit-inspired experience.

“Tim did the path without shoes and when we got to the

top, I remember rinsing his feet off with my water bottle.”

They were both stunned to see that while Tim’s feet were certainly dirty (and likely stinky from the goat excrement) he hadn’t gotten any cuts or bruises.

These moments — the call in the chapel and the hike —

**“These moments — the call in the chapel and the hike — some might just put down to serendipity or coincidence. Tim and Amy knew better. God was cementing their path together.”**

some might just put down to serendipity or coincidence. But Tim and Amy knew better. God was cementing their path together. Soon they were engaged. The two were married in May 2014 with a church full of extended family, including many priests and deacons. Today, they have nine years together, three boys, a mortgage, two careers and a family life inspired by the faith-filled examples they both grew up with.

## *Parental influences*

Statistics paint the sobering reality of the challenges to passing on the Catholic faith. According to a recent Pew study, only 6 in 10 people raised by Catholic parents are practicing their faith. Tim and Amy have the example of their parents, Gloria and Mike McNamara and Ree and Tim Millard, to inspire them.

“When we were growing up, our mom was very much ‘We go to church, and we serve,’” says Amy. “Teaching us to serve others has influenced myself and my siblings. My brother is a police officer, I’m a social worker and my sister is involved in health and wellness. We served church through migrant ministry, and we served the greater community through our involvement with Ministry with Community. We had the experience of going to church and thanking God for all our blessings.”

Tim chimes in with similar accolades for his parents, who modeled the priority of faith.

“My folks always stressed that every Sunday we go to Mass,” says Tim. “Didn’t matter if you had a sleepover and didn’t get any sleep — we always made that a priority.”

And it’s a priority Tim and Amy live today.

“On Sundays we get up and make it to 8 a.m. Mass,” says Tim. “It’s the most important thing we do all week — to worship God and give him thanks for all he’s given us.” And while Tim admits, “It’s sometimes World War III in the pews with the three of them fighting, I hope that our worship together takes root.”

## *Being in the world; not of the world*

“We try to incorporate in whatever we’re doing what the faith connection may be,” explains Amy.

Tim agrees and shares how he took his son Ollie’s obsession with ninjas as a teachable faith moment.

“This past Halloween Ollie dressed up as a ninja. I did some research on this and discovered that some ninjas will take vows of celibacy — so I took that opportunity to share that information with Ollie and connect it to the priesthood and their vow of celibacy. Who knows, maybe Ollie will be the first ninja priest,” laughs Tim.

For All Soul’s Day, Amy and the boys have begun a tradition of visiting the graves of family and friends, including Baby Chip (who they lost at 11 weeks gestation) as well as grandparents and dear family friend, Deacon Ed Feltes.





They visit Deacon Feltes at the cemetery, and it presents an opportunity to talk about the connection between Halloween and the sacred holy days that follow, explains Amy.

“Deacon Ed helped watch them, and he was very good at rocking Ollie when he was little,” remembers Amy. “He died before Micah was born but knew he was on his way.”

Now they can point to someone the kids knew as a soul to remember.

The other major holiday to contend with is how to balance the lure of Santa with the sacredness of Christ’s birth. There are tangible items such as their chocolate Advent calendar and their Fisher Price nativity play set. And then there are the opportunities to discuss and teach the importance of the day.

“We try talking to the boys about why we get presents — is it just because it’s a fun thing — We try to explain it’s Jesus’ birthday and he’s the best gift we can get,” explains Amy. “Last year we started watching ‘The Chosen’ Christmas special.” The acclaimed series really hit home, says Amy. “I really think the actors (and the show not being animated) really helped them to visualize Jesus being born and to be a real event we can talk about.”

Another tradition they began incorporating into their Advent observance is attending an Advent penance service.

“[The prayer service] gets us focused in on the season more and growing our own relationship with Christ,” says Tim. “It also brings a certain level of peace [to an otherwise hectic time]. I can enjoy the season knowing I’m rooted in His graces.”

## *Self-care for the soul*

Both Tim and Amy are quick to point out the importance of spending time in prayer, and they grab those moments when they can. Amy will read through the daily devotions provided by the Blessed Is She app, which she says she can do while simultaneously rocking Micah. Tim intersperses his time at the two parishes capturing those moments as he can through his ministry and frequent stop-ins to say something to Jesus. Together each night the two read the next day’s Gospel.

Amy also meets with her spiritual director and participates in an online Catholic Moms Facebook group. It was while sharing her experiences in this group that one of the members told her maybe she was called to the charism of intercession. Amy recalls, “I asked Tim, ‘is that a thing?’” she laughs.

“I ask God who I should pray for and immediately visualize someone in my mind,” explains Amy. “Sometimes an image will emerge so clearly before I can even figure out who it is. These aren’t people who I’ve seen lately or talked to recently (mostly). They are just random people that I know. So, I pray for them and then have told them that God had placed them on my heart, and I hope they find comfort in knowing God’s got them. Most of them come back and told me the timing was spot on. I’ve had one friend say, ‘how’d you know?’ And another shared that her grandmother had passed after being in great pain on the day I prayed for her.”

Amy says she plans to continue to explore this path and is reluctant to place any attention on herself. “If my prayers bring joy to anyone’s life, that’s a gift for me.

“And if my experience inspires others than that’s another gift. It’s just such a humbling thing.”

“No one’s denied it,” adds Tim.

Whether individually or as a family unit, what the McNamaras hope for most is that their lived faith journey and witness, guided by the Holy Spirit, helps others, wherever the people in their lives may be in their own spiritual relationship.

“Us continuing to live out our faith is what’s most important and who knows ... maybe someone will see that and hopefully it makes an impact,” says Tim.

And their hope for their boys?

“I just hope they are kind people and fully embrace their faith,” says Amy.

“Do we do it perfectly — by no means,” chimes in Tim, “but God’s in the struggle, and that’s part of the fun.” †

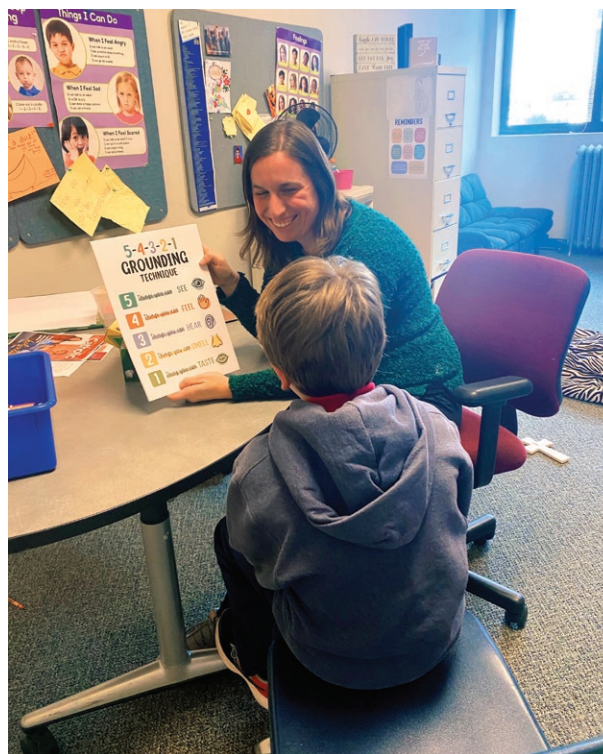






Photo by Victoria Cessna

**"Us continuing to live out our faith is what's most important and who knows ... maybe someone will see that and hopefully it makes an impact."**



*"It is in the family that many of God's dreams for the human community are realized. Hence, we cannot resign ourselves to the decline of the family in the name of uncertainty, individualism and consumerism, which envision a future of individuals who think only of themselves. We cannot be indifferent to the future of the family as a community of life and love, a unique and indissoluble covenant between a man and a woman, a place where generations meet, a source of hope for society. The family, it should be recalled, has a positive effect on everyone, since it is a generator of common good. Healthy family relationships represent a unique source of enrichment, not only for spouses and children but for the entire ecclesial and civil community."*

— Pope Francis



# SACRAMENTS of Healing

BY SARAH DEMOTT

IN THIS SECOND OF THREE IN OUR SERIES ON  
THE SACRAMENTS, WE LOOK DEEPER AT THE  
TWO SACRAMENTS OF HEALING.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) states:

“The Lord Jesus Christ, physician of our souls and bodies, who forgave the sins of the paralytic and restored him to bodily health, has willed that his Church continue, in the power of the Holy Spirit, his work of healing and salvation, even among her own members. This is the purpose of the two sacraments of healing: the sacrament of Penance and the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick.” (CCC 1421)

Getty Images/Ward Akopyan



## WHAT IS IT?

While the focus is often on our sins, the purpose of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (often called Confession) is actually on healing one's relationship with God (reconciling) through our atonement.

It is made of four basic actions: the penitent being sorry, confessing their sins, and working to repair the damage created through the sin and the priest giving absolution.

## SIX EFFECTS (CCC 1496)

- Reconciliation with God by which the penitent recovers grace
- Reconciliation with the Church
- Remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins
- Remission, at least in part, of temporal punishments resulting from sin
- Peace and serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation
- Increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle

## WHY CONFESS TO A PRIEST?

In the Gospel of John, Jesus granted his Apostles authority to hear and forgive sins when he said, “Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” (Jn 20:23) Jesus is sharing his authority with his Apostles. However, not only did he give them the power to forgive sins but also to not forgive sins, a serious consideration they could not properly undertake without specific knowledge of the sins in question. This is why during confession priests need to know what sins we have committed and that we are genuinely sorry for having committed them.

## Did you know?

Priests who hear confessions are bound by the “sacramental seal” under the threat of excommunication if violated under any circumstances. (CCC 1467)



## WHEN DO I NEED IT?

Canon law states a Catholic must receive the sacrament at least once per year. (Canon 989) However, you must also go to confession prior to receiving the Holy Eucharist whenever you are “conscious of grave sin.” (CCC 1457)

In addition to cleansing our soul of mortal sin, regular reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation can also help form our consciences, fight against sinful tendencies and strengthen and heals us in our spiritual lives, which is why even though it is only required to receive this Sacrament once a year, the Church highly recommends frequent reception and confession of even venial sins. Since this sacrament helps to repair our relationship with God after our sin has broken it in some way, regularly utilizing an examination of conscience in preparation for confession can help us better see the ways we are most often tempted and be better prepared to fight against it.

## WHAT MAKES A MORTAL SIN?

For a sin to be mortal it has to fulfill three requirements: serious matter, full knowledge and deliberate consent (CCC 1857); therefore, “serious matters” are usually serious violations of the 10 Commandments. “Full knowledge” means you are not ignorant that what sins you committed would damage your relationship with God. “Deliberate consent” means you freely chose to commit the sin. With these guidelines in mind, what was done and why are important factors when determining whether a sin was venial or mortal and why there is no definitive list of what is or isn’t a mortal sin.

While we can use the 10 Commandments as a set of guidelines for what could potentially be a mortal sin, its impact on our relationship with God, ourselves and others, and our knowledge and consent of the sin.

## HOW DO I DO IT?

Prior to attending either a regular confession time at a parish, a penance service, or a private appointment, utilizing an examination of conscience can be helpful in determining what sins to confess (see sidebar on right).

Canon law requires we include number and species when confessing mortal sin. While this doesn’t need to be an exact count of how many times we committed one particular sin or include many details, it’s important to help the priest give counsel and assign penance for him to understand the sin better.

Do not be afraid of going to Confession because you don’t know the right steps. The priest can help remind you of the steps and guide you through it.

1. Sign of the Cross
2. “Bless me Father for I have sinned, it has been [days/months/years] since my last confession.”
3. Confess Sins

4. Penance and Counsel
5. Act of Contrition
6. Prayer of Absolution
7. Sign of the Cross
8. Dismissal
9. Do the penance

## A BRIEF EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE BASED ON THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

- **I am the Lord your God: you shall not have strange Gods before me.**  
— *Have I treated people, events or things as more important than God?*
- **You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.**  
— *Have my words, actively or passively, put down God, the Church or people?*
- **Remember to keep holy the Lord’s Day.**  
— *Do I go to Mass every Sunday (or Saturday Vigil) and on Holy Days of Obligation (Jan. 1; the Ascension; Aug. 15; Nov. 1; Dec. 8; Dec. 25)? Do I avoid, when possible, work that impedes worship to God, joy for the Lord’s Day and proper relaxation of mind and body? Do I look for ways to spend time with family or in service on Sunday?*
- **Honor your father and your mother.**  
— *Do I show my parents due respect? Do I seek to maintain good communication with my parents where possible? Do I criticize them for lacking skills I think they should have?*
- **You shall not kill.**  
— *Have I harmed another through physical, verbal or emotional means, including gossip or manipulation of any kind?*
- **You shall not commit adultery.**  
— *Have I respected the physical and sexual dignity of others and of myself?*
- **You shall not steal.**  
— *Have I taken or wasted time or resources that belonged to another?*
- **You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**  
— *Have I gossiped, told lies or embellished stories at the expense of another?*
- **You shall not covet your neighbor’s spouse.**  
— *Have I honored my spouse with my full affection and exclusive love?*
- **You shall not covet your neighbor’s goods.**  
— *Am I content with my own means and needs, or do I compare myself to others unnecessarily?*

Copyright © 2013, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. Permission is hereby granted to duplicate this work without adaptation for non-commercial use.

Scripture excerpts used in this work are taken from the *New American Bible*, rev. ed. © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.





### WHAT IS IT?

Anointing of the Sick is made of three actions: the prayer of faith, the laying-on of hands and the anointing with oil.

The laying-on of hands can be found in several places in the Bible.

- He laid his hands on each of them and cured them.” (LK 4:40)
- “They drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.” (Mk 6:13)
- “Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint [him] with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven.” (Jas 5:14-15)

The priest anoints the sick individual's forehead, saying “Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit.” Then he anoints their hands, saying “May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.”

### WHY DO I NEED IT?

While one aspect of the sacrament is the prayerful hope for physical healing, if that be God's will, it is also a means of spiritual healing and receiving from the Holy Spirit the gifts of peace and fortitude against anxiety, discouragement and temptation as we endure our sufferings or approach the end of our earthly lives. (CCC 1520)

### EFFECTS (CCC 1532)

- The uniting of the sick person to the passion of Christ, for his own good and that of the whole Church
- The strengthening, peace, and courage to endure in a Christian manner the sufferings of illness or old age
- The forgiveness of sins, if the sick person was not able to obtain it through the sacrament of penance
- The restoration of health, if it is conducive to the salvation of his soul
- The preparation for passing over to eternal life

### CAN I RECEIVE IT MORE THAN ONCE?

Yes, this sacrament can be received each time a person is seriously ill, and additionally if their condition worsens, and again as they near the end of their life. While it used to be referred to as “last rites” and reserved only for those near death, the Second Vatican Council allowed for it to also be administered to those who are seriously ill.

### WHO CAN DO IT?

Only a priest can anoint the sick.

### Did you know?

Viaticum is what we call receiving the Eucharist and Precious Blood as we approach the end of our life. “Viaticum” means “on the way with you,” one last meal for the next journey. In addition to receiving Communion, faithful are often also given one last Anointing of the Sick along with a renewal of baptismal profession of faith and a sign of peace. †





# HELPING HESITANT KIDS GO TO confession



## SHERI WOHLFERT

is a Catholic wife, mom, grandma, speaker and writer. Catch her blog at [www.joyfulwords.org](http://www.joyfulwords.org)

There are some activities our kids don't have trouble doing, like eating treats and playing. Then there are those that are really important but aren't necessarily approached with the same enthusiasm and ease, such as doing chores or eating vegetables. As parents we encourage, persuade and insist because some things just have to be done. What about going to confession? This article offers some tips for helping kids receive the sacrament of reconciliation, which is essential to our sainthood but can fall into the category of things kids aren't fond of doing and can be a tough go for lots of reasons.

**The truth:** This sacrament is the mercy of Jesus in action. It's a gift to us, not a penalty to replace the words guilt, shame, bad and embarrassed with words such as forgiven, mercy, freedom and peace. The confessional isn't a penalty box but rather a place to be made shiny, new and stronger from the inside out.

**Purpose:** If our body is sick we go to a doctor and talk about what's going on so we can be made well. Help kids understand that our actions and words can hurt Jesus, ourselves and others, and leave our heart and soul in need of healing. Confession is the place we go to tell Jesus, through the priest, what's going on so we can be made well and receive the grace to avoid the same sins again. Jesus knew we'd need this

again and again, which is why he gave us the gift of this sacrament to keep us close and help us get to heaven. If we know the "why," it's easier to put the "how" in motion.

**The root:** If your child resists the thought of going to confession, have a conversation about why ... what worries them or bugs them about it.

**The practical:** Let them check out the confessional when the church is empty. Do a practice run (without the sins) so they know where to walk, sit or kneel. It's OK to have them walk in with the steps written down on a piece of paper. A common fear among kids is that they'll forget what to say or how to say it, so you can help them be prepared. As you practice/

role play a confession, switch roles and let the child be the priest to help them understand all the words and events of the sacrament. Find an age-appropriate examination of conscience to help them pray, ponder and prepare.

**Parents first:** If your child is nervous, hop in line ahead of them and when you are finished, tell the priest there is a nervous little one coming up behind you who might need a little TLC through the process.

**Divine amnesia:** A priest once told my class that one of his favorite graces as a priest is the grace of divine amnesia, which means he forgets everything he hears during confessions. It's typical for kids not to want to disappoint, so knowing the

priest has heard *everything*, and he will not remember nor is he ever allowed to share anything he hears in the confessional, can put their mind at ease. His job is not to judge us ... his job is to bring God's forgiveness and mercy. *In persona Christi* means the priest is acting "in the person of Christ."

**Go, and go again:** We know, as Catholic parents, that our job is to raise great humans who put Jesus at the center of their lives. In order to ensure that we are up to the task of raising saints, we must model the behavior we know to be right and true. The best way to help our children become comfortable and even joyful about confession is to go, and go regularly. We schedule dozens of things on the family calendar, and going to confession must appear there too.

Jesus is waiting in the sacrament of reconciliation and he has only the very best gifts to give your children there. †





# Preparing one's heart during Advent

**T**he word Advent means “coming.” Of course, we know that Advent leads up to Christmas, when we celebrate the coming of the Lord into the world, nine months after we mark when “the Word was made flesh” and Jesus became incarnate by the Holy Spirit. But Advent doesn’t only mark the anticipation of the Lord’s coming at Christmas. Advent means much more than that. Advent marks three comings. We are reminded that Christ came to us at Christmas. But we are also reminded that, one day, the Risen Lord will come to judge the living and the dead, as our creed professes. The third way that the Lord comes to us is in our daily prayer and the sacraments. In each case, Jesus becomes a light in the darkness.

— Father John Fleckenstein, Pastor, St. Joseph Parish, St. Joseph.

The Advent readings call us to be alert and ready, not weighted down and distracted by the cares of this world. Like Lent, the liturgical color for Advent is purple since both are seasons that prepare us for great feast days. Advent also includes an element of penance in the sense of preparing, quieting and disciplining our hearts for the full joy of Christmas.

As we prepare for Christmas, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* notes some differences to the Mass that should be observed during the season. For instance, the priest wears violet or purple during Advent, except for the Third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday) when rose may be worn (*GIRM*, no. 346). Aside from

what the priest wears, other aesthetic changes in the Church can include a more modestly decorated altar.

The final days of Advent, the week of December 17 to December 24 (similar in structure to Holy Week leading to Easter), we focus on our preparation for the celebrations of the Nativity of our Lord at Christmas. In particular, the O Antiphons are sung during this period and have been by the Church since at least the eighth century. They highlight an ancient biblical imagery drawn from the messianic hopes of the Old Testament to proclaim the coming of Christ as the fulfillment not only of Old Testament hopes, but of present ones, as well.

Penance services are common during Advent, which usually include prayer, readings, a short reflection and an examination of conscience (see page 21) with multiple priests available to hear confessions.

Following is a list of Advent Penance Services:

- December 3, 3 p.m.: St. Augustine Cathedral Parish
- December 6, 6:30 p.m.: St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Portage
- December 6, 7 p.m.: St. Rose of Lima Parish, Hastings
- December 7, 5:30 p.m.: St. Mary’s Assumption Parish, Bronson
- December 7, 5:30 p.m.: Our Lady of Fatima Parish, Union City
- December 8, 5:30 p.m.: St. Charles Borromeo Parish, Coldwater
- December 10, 3 p.m.: St. Martin of Tours Parish, Vicksburg
- December 11, 6:30 p.m.: St. Thomas More Student Parish, Kalamazoo
- December 12, 6 p.m.: St. Therese of Lisieux Parish, Wayland
- December 13, Immaculate Conception Parish, Three Rivers, 4:30 p.m.
- December 13, 6 p.m.: St. Joseph Parish, Kalamazoo
- December 13, 7 p.m.: St. Joseph Parish, Battle Creek, Tri-Parish Advent Penance Service; confessions will be heard in English, Spanish and Burmese
- December 14, 6 p.m.: St. Monica Parish, Kalamazoo
- December 15, 6 p.m.: St. Charles Borromeo Parish, Coldwater
- December 15, 6 p.m.: St. Mary’s Assumption Parish, Bronson
- December 18, 6 p.m.: Our Lady of Fatima Parish, Union City
- December 18, 6 p.m.: St. Mary of the Assumption Parish, Three Oaks
- December 19, 6 p.m.: St. Mary of the Lake Parish, New Buffalo
- December 19, 6 p.m.: St. Ambrose Parish, Parchment
- December 19, 6:30 p.m.: SS John/Bernard Parish (St. Bernard Church), Benton Harbor
- December 20, Noon: St. Ann Parish, Cassopolis
- December 21, 6 p.m.: St. Charles Borromeo Parish, Coldwater
- December 21, 6 p.m.: St. Mary’s Assumption Parish, Bronson †





# Bishop Bradley called out of retirement

## APPOINTED APOSTOLIC ADMINISTRATOR, DIOCESE OF STEUBENVILLE

BY VICTORIA CESSNA

**Barely two months into his retirement** as Bishop Emeritus for the Diocese of Kalamazoo, Bishop Paul Bradley received yet another call from the Apostolic Nuncio, Cardinal Christophe Pierre. The preceding call from the nuncio (the pope's designate) this past May was to accept his retirement as bishop of the Diocese of Kalamazoo; this call was to relay the news that the Holy Father had appointed him the Apostolic Administrator for the Diocese of Steubenville (Ohio).

Within days of receiving the news Bishop Bradley was readying for the announcement, which took place on Sept. 28, 2023, at the diocesan pastoral center offices in Steubenville. The appointment comes as the diocese's outgoing shepherd, Bishop Jeffrey Monforton, was appointed an auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of Detroit.

During the news media conference announcing the appointment, Bishop Bradley remarked that while he was surprised to receive the call, he had been wondering if there was something more he could be doing. The diocese is home to Franciscan University, a small Catholic university, well-known for its youth conferences and online Catholic courses\*

An Apostolic Administrator is a role appointed by the Holy Father that differs slightly from being a bishop. As Bishop Bradley explained in a letter to the faithful of the Diocese of Steubenville, "Though the title might be unfamiliar, I come to you as a Bishop who, for 14 years, served as the Bishop of the Diocese of Kalamazoo and for five years before that as Auxiliary Bishop for the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Though Pope Francis has just given me permission to retire this past May, I consider it a privilege to be asked now to accompany all of you in this Local

Church during this time of transition."

The transition time for Bishop Bradley's new appointment is undefined, though when concluded he plans to return to the Diocese of Kalamazoo.

While not common it's also not unusual for retired bishops to assist in diocesan ministry and be appointed by the pope as Apostolic Administrators. Bishop Emeritus Walter Hurley (former bishop of the Diocese of Grand Rapids) served that role in the Diocese of Saginaw after the untimely death of Bishop Cis-

“

I CONSIDER IT A PRIVILEGE  
TO BE ASKED NOW TO  
ACCOMPANY ALL OF YOU IN  
THIS LOCAL CHURCH DURING  
THIS TIME OF TRANSITION.”

tone and again in the Diocese of Gaylord after Bishop Stephen Raica was appointed as bishop of the Diocese of Birmingham and before Bishop Jeffrey Walsh was appointed. The role differs from being a Diocesan Administrator, which is an elected position. For example, the late Msgr. Eugene Sears was elected by the College of Consultors (priests) and served as Diocesan Administrator in the Diocese of Kalamazoo after the death of Bishop Alfred Markiewicz.

The Diocese of Steubenville was established in 1944 and is home to approximately 29,000 Catholics. †

*\*Franciscan online courses are included as part of the Institute of Missionary Disciples (IMD).*





BY SISTER  
MARYUD CORTES,  
MSDE, PHD

**“For a child is  
born to us, a son  
is given to us,  
upon his shoulder  
dominion rests.  
They name  
him Wonder-  
Counselor, God-  
Hero, Father-  
Forever, Prince  
of Peace.”**

(Is 9:5)

## FROM THE CONTEMPLATIVE SILENCE OF ADVENT *to the Joy of the Celebration of Christmas*

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, JUST A FEW MONTHS AGO, I WALKED WITH EXCITEMENT THROUGH THE BEAUTIFUL AND PICTURESQUE STREETS OF ASSISI, ITALY, AND WHAT I EXPERIENCED THERE WAS NOTHING LESS THAN A SPIRITUAL RENEWAL THAT FILLED ME WITH A NEW SENSE OF WONDER. I HAD SUCH A PROFOUND AND VIBRANT ENCOUNTER WITH THE SPIRITUALITY OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI THAT IT STILL RESONATES IN MY HEART. AND TODAY, WITH THE SAME FERVOR AND JOY, I WANT TO SHARE WITH ALL OF YOU ONE OF THE MANY TREASURES THIS EXPERIENCE OFFERED ME.

Can you imagine? Saint Francis, with his unwavering love for the person of Jesus, gave us something that transcends time. Yes, I’m talking about the manger. This representation of the nativity scene that he introduced in the town of Greccio, Italy, on Christmas of 1223, is not just a tradition, it is a calling! It is a call to see ourselves reflected in the hopeful eyes of Joseph and Mary as they journey towards Bethlehem with their beating hearts full of faith but also with questions that did not exhaust the well of their joyful wait for the Messiah.

Ah, the manger, it is more than just a representation; it is a reminder of the happiness and joy we should feel in one of the most wonderful and profound seasons of the year. It is a call to be the best version of ourselves, to radiate love and kindness. And now, with a soul full of emotion, I wonder: what did Saint Francis feel when he gave life to

that manger? Can you imagine the intensity of his personal Advent, awaiting the arrival of the baby God who changed the course of our lives and wanting to share it with everyone?

My brothers and sisters, I extend to you an invitation — no, a challenge. During this Advent, let yourself be carried away by the Holy Spirit, immerse yourself in contemplation, in prayer for the great Miracle to occur and let me tell you: the joy of Advent and Christmas awaits us with open arms. Together, let us first embrace the reflection of Advent, and then, let us celebrate the arrival of Christmas with all our being.

Come, join me on this spiritual journey. I promise you it will be unforgettable. I wish you all a blessed Advent and Christmas season, and remember: to fully experience Christmas, we must first immerse ourselves in the contemplation of Advent. †



# DEL SILENCIO CONTEMPLATIVO DEL ADVIENTO

## *al Gozo de la Celebración de la Navidad*

¡QUERIDOS HERMANOS Y HERMANAS! HACE SOLO UNOS MESES, CAMINÉ CON EMOCIÓN POR LAS HERMOSAS Y PINTORESCAS CALLES DE ASÍS, ITALIA, Y LO QUE EXPERIMENTÉ ALLÍ FUE NADA MENOS QUE UNA RENOVACIÓN ESPIRITUAL QUE ME LLENO DE UN NUEVO SENTIR. TUVE UN ENCUENTRO TAN PROFUNDO Y VIBRANTE CON LA ESPIRITUALIDAD DE SAN FRANCISCO DE ASÍS QUE AÚN RESUENA EN MI CORAZÓN. Y HOY, CON EL MISMO FERVOR Y ALEGRÍA, QUIERO COMPARTIR CON TODOS USTEDES UNO DE LOS TANTOS TESOROS QUE ESTA EXPERIENCIA ME OFRECIÓ.

**POR LA HERMANA  
MARYUD CORTES, MSDE, PHD**

¿Pueden Imaginarse?  
San Francisco, con su amor inquebrantable por la persona de Jesús, nos regaló algo que nacimiento el tiempo. Sí, ¡el pesebre! Esta representación del nacimiento que él introdujo en el pueblo de Greccio, Italia en la Navidad 1223,

no es solo una tradición, ¡es un llamado! Un llamado a vernos reflejados en los ojos esperanzadores de San José y de Santa María, mientras avanzan hacia Belén, con sus corazones palpitantes llenos de fe y por qué no también con preguntas pero sin agotar el pozo de su gozosa espera del Mesías.

¡Ah, el pesebre! Es más que una simple representación; es un recordatorio de la alegría y del gozo que deberíamos sentir en una de las temporadas más maravillosas y profundas del año. Es un llamado a ser la

mejor versión de nosotros mismos, ¡a irradiar amor y bondad!

Y ahora, con el alma llena de emoción, me pregunto: ¿qué sentiría San Francisco al dar vida a ese pesebre? ¿Pueden imaginar la intensidad de su Adviento personal, esperando la llegada del hijo de Dios que cambió el curso de nuestras vidas y deseando compartirlo con todos?

Hermanos y hermanas míos, les extiendo una invitación, no, ¡un desafío! Durante este Adviento, déjense llevar por el Espíritu Santo, sumérjanse en la contemplación, en la oración para que ocurra el

gran Milagro y déjenme decirles: ¡la alegría del Adviento y la Navidad nos espera con los brazos abiertos! Juntos, abracemos primero la reflexión del Adviento, y luego, ¡celebrems con todo nuestro ser la llegada de la Navidad!

¡Vamos, acompáñenme en este viaje espiritual! Les prometo que será inolvidable. Les deseo a todos un bendecido tiempo de Adviento y Navidad, y recuerden: ¡para vivir plenamente la Navidad, primero debemos sumergirnos en la contemplación del Adviento! †

**“Porque un niño nos ha nacido,  
un hijo se nos ha dado; le ponen  
en el hombro el distintivo del rey y  
proclaman su nombre: Consejero  
admirable, Dios fuerte, Padre que  
no muere, príncipe de la Paz.”**

Isaías 9,5





# The 'life and breath' of Christ







PHOTOS BY VICTORIA CESSNA

**P**arish staff members from around the diocese reconnected with each other, participated in Mass celebrated by Bishop Edward Lohse and attended informational sessions at the recent *Connecting with Our Parishes* event. The day-long gathering held on Nov. 9, 2023, was hosted by Bishop Lohse and the diocesan staff and held at St. Martin of Tours Parish, Vicksburg. Sessions ranged from the legalities of employee management to reflections on communications and Mass participation. In his address to participants, Bishop Lohse thanked all those working in the parishes for being the “life and breath” of Christ in the community. More than 100 attendees representing nearly all the 59 parishes and missions in the diocese attended. †







# CREATE A LEGACY THAT LASTS A LIFETIME

## WITH A CATHOLIC GIFT ANNUITY

With a Catholic Gift Annuity, you can secure the future for yourself and your loved ones, and give a lasting gift for your parish, school or our diocese.

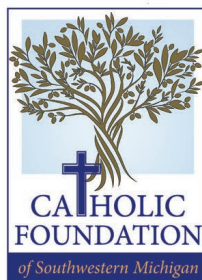
### HERE'S HOW IT WORKS

- Fixed-rate annuity payments for life for either one or two people
- Immediate and future tax benefits
- A payment schedule tailored to your needs
- Knowing that you will help Catholics in need in our diocese

| AGE   | ANNUAL<br>PAYOUT RATE |
|-------|-----------------------|
| 60-64 | 4.9-5.3%              |
| 65-69 | 5.4-5.8%              |
| 70-74 | 5.9-6.4%              |
| 75-79 | 6.6-7.4%              |
| 80-84 | 7.6-8.5%              |
| 85-89 | 8.7-9.5%              |
| 90+   | 9.7%                  |

**For a personalized proposal,  
contact: Keith Tharp - 269.349.8714 x1351  
or [ktharp@diokzoo.org](mailto:ktharp@diokzoo.org)**

**[catholicgiftannuity.org](http://catholicgiftannuity.org)**



CATHOLIC FOUNDATION  
OF  
SOUTHWESTERN MICHIGAN  
[catholicfoundationswmi.org](http://catholicfoundationswmi.org)



## LITURGICAL CALENDAR 2024

The 2024 Liturgical Year will begin with the first Sunday in Advent. Sunday readings will be from Cycle B.

### December 2023

- First Sunday of Advent — Dec. 3
- Feast of the Immaculate Conception\* — Dec. 8
- Second Sunday of Advent — Dec. 10
- Our Lady of Guadalupe — Dec. 12
- Third Sunday of Advent — Dec. 17
- Fourth Sunday of Advent — Dec. 24
- Christmas\* — Dec. 25
- St. Stephen, First Martyr — Dec. 26
- St. John, Apostle and Evangelist — Dec. 27
- The Holy innocents, Martyrs — Dec. 28

### January 2024

- Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God — Jan. 1
- The Epiphany of the Lord — Jan. 7
- The Baptism of the Lord — Jan. 8
- Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children — Jan. 22

### February 2024

- The Presentation of the Lord — Feb. 2
- Ash Wednesday — Feb. 14
- First Sunday of Lent — Feb. 16
- Second Sunday of Lent — Feb. 25

### March 2024

- Third Sunday of Lent — March 3
- Fourth Sunday of Lent — March 10
- Fifth Sunday of Lent — March 17
- Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary — March 19
- Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord — March 24
- Holy Thursday — March 28
- Good Friday — March 29
- Holy Saturday — March 30
- Easter Sunday of the

Resurrection of the Lord — March 31

### April 2024

- Divine Mercy Sunday — April 7
- The Annunciation of the Lord — April 8

### May 2024

- The Ascension of the Lord — May 12
- Pentecost Sunday — May 19
- The Most Holy Trinity — May 26

### June 2024

- The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi) — June 2
- The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus — June 7
- The Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary — June 8
- The Nativity of Saint John the Baptist — June 24
- Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles — June 29

### Aug. 2024

- The Transfiguration of the Lord — Aug. 6
- The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary — Aug. 15\*
- Solemnity of Saint Augustine, Bishop and Doctor of the Church, Patron of the Diocese of Kalamazoo — Aug. 28

### Sept. 2024

- The Exaltation of the Holy Cross — Sept. 14
- Saint Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist — Sept. 21

### Oct. 2024

- Saints Simon and Jude, Apostles — Oct. 28

### Nov. 2024

- All Saints' Day — Nov. 1\*
- The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls' Day) — Nov. 2
- Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe — Nov. 24
- Saint Andrew, Apostle — Nov. 30

\*denotes Holy Day of Obligation

## ■ THE PRESENCE

This year's "The Presence" Eucharist-centered youth retreat will be held March 1-3, 2024, at Camp Geneva in Holland. All youth groups are invited for a weekend of faith, fellowship, adoration and prayer.

Registration is conducted through the parish's youth group leader. Cost is \$135 per person for the weekend, which will include a guest speaker, praise and worship music, pizza night on Friday, three meals on Saturday, and breakfast on Sunday as well as lodging in cabins at Camp Geneva. This year's guest speaker is Michael Gormley, who has presented at the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) and other youth events around the country. For more information, contact Joan Jaconette at [jjaconette@diokzoo.org](mailto:jjaconette@diokzoo.org) or 269-349-8714 ext. 1113.

## ■ CONSIDER THE CATHOLIC FOUNDATION OF SOUTHWESTERN MICHIGAN IN YOUR YEAR-END GIVING

There are many ways you can support your parish fund through the Catholic Foundation of Southwestern Michigan (CFSM) with your end-of-year giving.

**Gifts of Stock** — Do you have stock that has appreciated and want to avoid capital gains? Donate your stock to your parish fund and maximize your charitable deductions. If you have stock, you can deduct the entire market value of it as a charitable deduction by donating the stock directly to CFSM (if you itemize deductions).

**Charitable Rollovers from an IRA** — If you have assets in an IRA or you don't deduct charitable gifts, you can benefit the most from an IRA rollover. Charitable IRA rollover distributions count toward required minimum distributions. If you are 70½ or older, your IRA may be used as a convenient, tax-free way to make gifts up to \$100,000, while satisfying required minimum distributions (RMD)!

**Donor Advised Funds** — With this technique, you can make a large contribution in one tax year to establish or add to a donor-advised fund. If the gift is large enough, you may be able to itemize deductions that year. Donor-advised funds are relatively inexpensive to establish and maintain. You can also donate with a credit card online at [catholicfoundationswmi.org](http://catholicfoundationswmi.org). For more information, contact Keith Tharp at [ktharp@diokzoo.org](mailto:ktharp@diokzoo.org) or 269-349-8714 ext. 1351.



**Christmas 2023**

Are you ready to celebrate the season? Know what the obligations are and how to fulfill them.

This year the 4th Sunday in Advent is also Christmas Eve. You will need to attend a Mass to fulfill your Sunday obligation and one to fulfill the Christmas Holy Day obligation. Please check with your local parish to confirm at what time Christmas Eve Masses will be held.

**CHOOSE ONE MASS FOR EACH LITURGY**

|                             |            |                          |
|-----------------------------|------------|--------------------------|
| <b>4th Sunday of Advent</b> |            | <b>Christmas</b>         |
| Dec. 23 -                   |            | Dec. 24 -                |
| Saturday Vigil Mass         | <i>and</i> | Christmas Eve Vigil Mass |
| -or-                        |            | -or-                     |
| Dec. 24 -                   |            | Dec. 25 -                |
| Sunday Mass                 |            | Christmas Mass           |

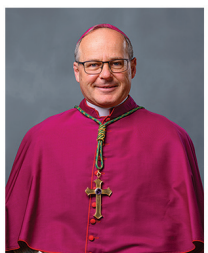




**Diocese of Kalamazoo**  
Diocesan Pastoral Center  
215 N. Westnedge Ave.  
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

NONPROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Kalamazoo, MI  
Permit #1085

# Christmas Blessing



MOST REVEREND  
EDWARD M. LOHSE

BISHOP OF THE  
DIOCESE OF  
KALAMAZOO

*Dear Sisters and Brothers  
in Christ,*

*Please be assured of my thoughts  
and prayers for you and your  
family during this sacred and holy  
Advent and Christmas season.*

*I will remember you especially  
during the celebration of  
Midnight Mass.*

*May you have a blessed  
Christmas season.*

*Faithfully yours in Christ,  
Bishop Edward M. Lohse*



Adoration of the Magi • Creator: Albrecht Dürer 1504

*Rejoice* in the glory of the birth of *Christ*  
and celebrate the Miracles and Blessings of the  
*Holy Spirit*