

God  
became one  
with us . . .  
became the  
light  
inside of  
everything.



*Shine*

christmas season 2020 -2021  
community reflections

**Christmas to January 2**

**Christmas Eve**  
Christy Hicks Aydt

**Comfort and Joy**

Merry Christmas!  
In whatever way  
you are celebrating  
this Christmas Eve,  
I hope you are  
filled with joy and  
light. It has been a

solemn and difficult year, but the best of Christmas draws us to the *magical, mysterious, and Wonder-full.*



Happy feast of Christmas. May it be a feast of joy, wonder, and miracle-magic for you and your beloved ones. Feast. Delight. Let your cup run over. All of these invitations come through our Christmas readings.

*Let the Heavens be glad and the earth rejoice*, the Psalmist sings. The lowliest, the shepherds, witness heaven sing in the gospel of Luke: *Glory to God in the highest/and on earth peace to those on whom God's favor rests.* And from the prophet Isaiah: *As a bridegroom rejoices in his bride/so shall your God rejoice in you!* Joseph also has an angel visit him in the gospel of Matthew to comfort and assure him that he is called to be the stepfather of Jesus.

Yes, today we are still struggling as a pilgrim people in a broken world--pandemic, hard-heartedness, greed, inhumanity. Maybe your heart is heavy and sorrowing, weary from toil and the cold spaces in the world. Undoubtedly you have endured a hard and long year. But I hope that this day or this night you will *keep the feast* and find a warm space in your heart to birth once more the Christmas light who is Jesus, our Savior, Christ the Lord.

## Christmas Day

Joseph Roach

As I sit down to write this reflection it is a few days before Christmas and I'm trying to make my deadline so Marie can get this printed. This is just one of the many deadlines I'm trying to meet this week, I work retail so there is that, I'm the sacristan for the church, so I'm part of the team getting the church turned over from Advent to Christmas, there are a few gifts left to get, and so on. There is so much for all of us to do to prepare for Christmas, and it seems especially difficult this year, because all the social rules have been changed to protect ourselves and those we love. SO MUCH STRESS!!

But then I remind myself, this reflection will be read after the preparation of the church, after the gifts will have been wrapped placed under the tree and by now, unwrapped. The wait, the preparation and the anticipation are over, Advent is finished and Christmas is here, Jesus Christ is born! The joy of the day and the season are here today right now this very moment. REJOICE!!

Isaiah reminds us, "Your God is King!" REJOICE!! and, "For the Lord comforts his people," REJOICE!!

John's Gospel tells us, "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth." REJOICE!!

It has been a difficult year for every single person, but I hope, at least for a day or two we can REJOICE in the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. I hope everyone is filled with joy this Christmas season, REJOICE in the Lord always.



## The Feast of St. Stephen, Deacon and Martyr

Saturday

Patrick McCrudden

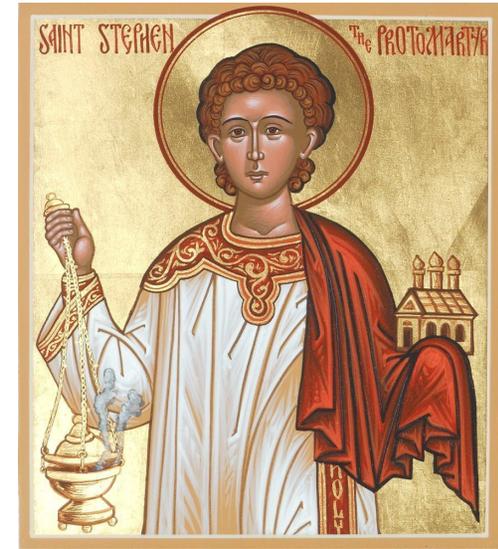
Today, as often feels like the case, the church seems out of step with the rest of society. Just yesterday we celebrated the great feast of Christmas. Through the weeks of Advent, we haven't been singing carols or decorating our churches with lights and trees but have instead been focused on watching and waiting and preparing. Finally, it feels like we should be celebrating but instead we are called to consider the story of St. Stephen.

St. Stephen is called Deacon and Martyr. The word "Deacon," comes from the Greek *diákonos* meaning servant, messenger or minister. Both men and women are mentioned in the New Testament in the role of Deacon which is certainly fitting as all our called to serve the people of God and be a messenger of the Gospel.

Although St. Stephen's story from the Acts of the Apostles feels out of step with our celebratory mood, it points to an important reality. Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus will result in our service and messages or our words and actions reflecting the priorities of our God and Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our priorities then might sometimes lead us into disagreement and conflict with the world at large.

On this Feast of St. Stephen let us take a moment and reflect on our diaconal service. How am I a servant to the people of God? What messages do I carry to the world? Does fear restrain my words and actions?

St. Stephen pray for us that we might, like you, courageously keep our eyes focused on Jesus.

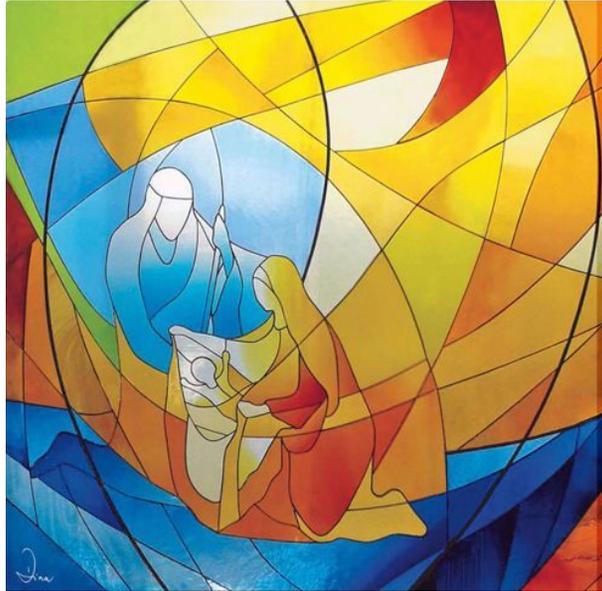


## Feast of the Holy Family

Walt Mutschler

Jesus is born and among us. Do we recognize him in our lives?

Today's reading in Luke's gospel reveals much about how we must prepare ourselves. We are told that Jesus is brought to Jerusalem for his presentation, where Simeon has been awaiting the coming of the Christ. No doubt he had been waiting for



many years. Also waiting is Anna, an old prophetess. When Jesus appears, both immediately recognize him for who he is. Yet how many other people are also in the temple, but fail to understand who is standing in their midst? Why are Simeon and Anna so certain about Jesus' identity?

Simeon is described as "righteous and devout." We are told Anna "worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer." They are not idly waiting. Both of these Biblical figures show us what kind of faithfulness, commitment, and devotion is necessary to recognize Jesus when he comes. Is this not also true of the three magi mentioned earlier in Luke's gospel at Jesus' birth? When they see the star, they already know it will take them to a newborn king. How can they be so sure?

This is what the Advent season has been preparing us for. We must be intentional disciples by putting our belief into action. Without this dedication to our faith, we can easily miss Jesus when he shows up to answer our prayers.

## Feast of the Holy

### Innocents

Monday

Maureen Fox



In reading this gospel, the themes of sacrifice and faith seem most obvious to me. Today's feast commemorates the lives of all the baby boys in and around Bethlehem, sacrificed merely because they were born in the wrong place at the wrong time, potential obstacles to Herod's reign. Although they didn't consciously offer themselves in sacrifice for Jesus, the Church considers them martyrs, dying in Christ's stead. Similar scenarios have been repeated over and over throughout Church history—innocents sacrificed for our Lord—culminating with the Lamb's own sacrifice on the cross for us. When we offer ourselves for him, he will do so in return for us.

Joseph and Mary exhibit what we would nowadays call blind faith—following a call with no tangible evidence of its foundation. After Joseph received the message to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt, with essentially no time to prepare, they left immediately, in the dead of night. They didn't know how long this exile would last, where they would live, nor how they would survive, but they obeyed without question. Joseph and Mary unhesitatingly made the sacrifice to protect the divine child. What a terrible hardship this must have been for the family, but they to put their trust in God through their faith and their willingness to make sacrifices.

Much the same, our faith requires belief without prior proof. It is at our most difficult times, like the Holy Family, that our faith is tested. If we follow their example, however, we allow God to guide and protect us, as he did them.

## Fifth Day in the Octave of Christmas

Tuesday

*Steve Ohmer*



As we are in the midst of the twelve days of Christmas, it is good and fitting and proper that we offer our own two turtledoves as a symbol of our love for God and to give thanks for all our blessings. John reveals, ‘the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.’ There is no room for hatred or doubt as the darkness has lifted and the light shines bright.

Through prayer God knows us, strengthens us, and teaches us to recognize the voice of the Spirit and works in quiet ways to reward our patience and perseverance.

Simeon, through prayer, waited patiently for Christ the Lord to be revealed and then took Christ the Lord in his arms and blessed him giving thanks: “Lord, now let your servant go in peace; your Word has been fulfilled; my own eyes have seen the salvation which you prepared in the sight of every people...” Blessed be all who have not seen Christ the Lord in the flesh but have seen God for sure as God promised and believe.

Prayer is the gift that opens our eyes, ears and being to the Holy Spirit and recognize Christ the Lord in the world as Simeon was able to do. Let us all give our offering of thanks through our special two turtledoves to Christ the Lord for all our blessings and for the light in the world for all of mankind. Believe!!! Believe!!! Believe!!! Believe!!! Believe!!! Believe!!! Believe!!! Believe!!!

## Sixth Day in the Octave of Christmas

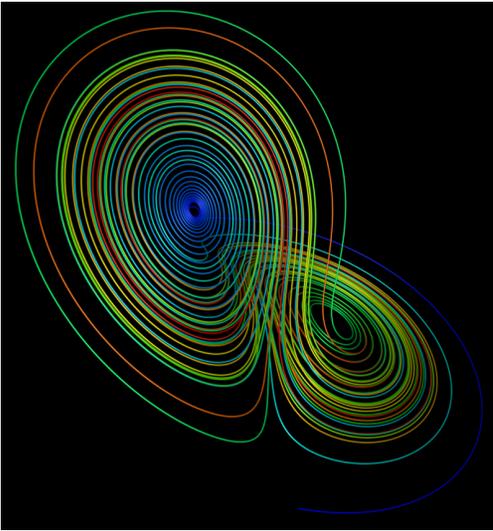
Wednesday

*Kirt Bromley*

I live in a world that has a mind-set entirely different from the prophetess Anna, who is mentioned in today’s Gospel reading in Luke 2: 36-40. After her husband’s death, up to the time when Jesus’ parents presented him as a baby in the Temple in Jerusalem, Anna filled her days with fasting and prayer in the Temple. One could say that she was an early contemplative. When Jesus was brought to the Temple, she immediately recognized him as a gift from God. Her mind and her heart were focused on God’s person and God’s work in the world. She easily recognized Jesus, the Son of God.

There is another mind-set that I meet every day. It is popular and engrained in our culture. Part of it is reflected in the oft quoted, “Look out for number one.” This number one is not the One that Anna worships. Today’s first reading from the First Letter of John, Chapter 2: 12-17 confirms this, “For all that is in the world, sensual lust, enticement for the eyes and a pretentious life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.” As a help to be in God’s mindset each day, I take up a piece out of Anna’s life and read the Scripture of the day, whether or not I go to Mass. This is the same daily nourishment that Anna





## Seventh Day in the Octave of Christmas

Thursday  
*Melody Gee*

On the last day of the year, beginnings and endings converge. The new liturgical year begins as the calendar year is ending. The Christmas season returns us to the beginning of Jesus' life on earth. And today's reading from John 1:1 carries us back to the ultimate beginning, which was the Word.

It seems fitting to be reminded this pandemic winter that Scriptural time is not linear. These days, my own sense of time is completely confused. Days, hours, and even seasons don't feel distinct at all. I don't mark time with the usual cues—kids leaving for school, workday routines, kids returning home, dinner, homework, bed. Now, school, work, and family are all blurred and crowded together in one space, all the time. I myself feel indistinct and, to be honest, dulled. I long to give myself fully to one thing at a time instead of feeling persistently divided.

For months, we have been waiting for an end to our waiting, and hoping for a new beginning. In the meantime, all we can do is be inside this roiling, boundary-less life, this mess of scarce time and abundant presence. I try to remember this Christmas season that we are already inside a new beginning, and that new beginnings are possible at every moment. Time is already collapsed inside us, the eternal and the mortal filling up every frantic, uncertain, and joyful moment.

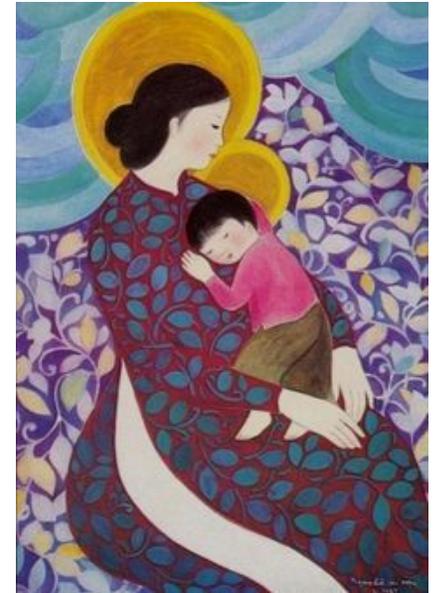
## Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

New Years Day  
*Marie Andrews*

Today's gospel tells us what Mary held in her heart. So I must ask what do I hold in my heart? Who do I hold in my heart? Of course the for many the obvious answers are the earth, family and friends. It seems during these times I hold them a little more dearly. I also want to believe I hold the poor in my heart. Just a couple of years back I was priveleged to meet Gustavo Gutierrez, father of liberation theology, when he accepted an award at St. Ambrose College. About the poor we claim to love he says, name them. Immediatley names pop into my mind. Lisa, Darlene, Joe, Maria Theresa, Leanordo, .... But have I blessed them. Perhaps the blessing from our first reading might do us well.

The LORD bless you and keep you!  
The LORD let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you!  
The LORD look upon you kindly and give you peace!

Surely these words are not enough. For what good is it if you see someone in need and tell them keep warm and well fed when they have nothing to eat or wear. This is where God mercifully blesses us, for it is impossible to hold anyone alone. Mary is not alone, the shepherds are not alone, we are not alone. We have God and the rich blessings of our communities. No one need do the work of feeding the hungry or clothing the naked alone. Neither do we have to do the work of praising God alone. Often times it is the ones who are receiving who remind me to praise God with a joyful heart. For we are all called to be a part of God's family. We are heirs and there is no better inheritance than the love of God.



## Saturday after New Year's Day

Carly Sanderson

Who is St. John the Baptist? How can I, a stay at home mom of two, relate to a camel-hair-wearing, locust-eating, man of the wilderness?

*"I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord...'"*

St. John the Baptist didn't live to build up his own admiration but to

proclaim the arrival of Jesus Christ. I can do that too; this is an area where John the Baptist and I can come together. We both want to spread the good news of Christ. Now I obviously don't have a following quite like St. John the Baptist that I can proclaim this good news to but I can work with the relationships that I do have. I can teach my daughter to slow down and thank God before eating because he gives us all good things. I can lovingly reprimand my ten month old for playing in the toilet (yes, this is still an issue). I can regularly call my brother as an attempt to build our relationship so I can share Christ with him. I can slow down (this seems to be a recurring theme) and engage in conversation with my neighbors. The secular world tells us that Christmas ends at midnight on the 25th but as Catholics let's continue to spread the news of the birth of Christ like St. John the Baptist.

