

December Agenda

Rosary	Saturday, 5 December, 9:45am
Immaculate Conception	Tuesday, 8 December, 7 pm
Wednesday Night at the Movies	Wednesday, 16 December, 7pm
S. Thomas	Monday, 21 December, 7pm
Lessons and Carols	Thursday, 24 December, 6pm
Carol Sing	Thursday, 24 December 10:30pm
First Mass of Christmas	Thursday, 24 December, 11pm
Nativity of Our Lord	Friday, 25 December, 8 and 10am
S. Stephen	Saturday, 26 December, 10am
Holy Innocents	Monday, 28 December, 7pm

Parish Brochure

Color brochures are available for advertising our parish. You may find them in the back of the church by the west doors and in the Annex. Please take a few, and leave them in any place you frequent during the week.

Standing Notices

The occasional Sacraments of Baptism, Matrimony, Confession, Communion and Unction of the Sick, and the Office of the Dead are always available by appointment, at announced times, or as necessary.

Please call or e-mail the Church Office or the Rectory to inform the clergy if you or a loved one is in hospital.

PLEASE REMEMBER THE PARISH IN YOUR WILL

The Anglican Church of
S. John the Baptist
PO Box 550
Marshall, VA 20116



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If you would like to contribute to this newsletter, please email:

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ECCE

The Newsletter of S. John the Baptist Anglican Church
Marshall, Virginia
Issue 25, December 2009

Dear Family and Friends of S. John's,

In contrast to 1 January in the secular year, Advent Sunday marks the start of the Christian year. Advent does not begin on the same day each year, but begins with the Sunday that anticipates the Feast of the Nativity by four weeks. Just as the beginning of the Christian era is measured by the appearance of the Incarnate Word, so is the beginning of each Church year. That "Light which has come into the world" makes all things new.

The Church, in her wisdom, sets aside these four weeks before Christmas as a time to prepare ourselves for the advent of the God of the universe now made present in our human nature. Although not as penitential a season as Lent, it does bear some of the same marks, such as violet vestments, absence of altar flowers and the omission of the Gloria in the Mass. All of this solemnity comes together to heighten our sense of anticipation.

These exterior manifestations of Advent are meant to lead us to an interior reflection on our lives. What barriers have we erected that keeps us from receiving all that the Incarnation is meant to bring to us individually? What sins do we carry within us that prevent the grace of God reaching into our very depths? These are the questions we are to be asking of ourselves during these four weeks of Advent.

The birth of Jesus of Nazareth radically altered the human race; God taking to Himself our broken and fallen human nature. But that life-changing event will have no effect on us personally until we come to Our Lord, in our brokenness. When we come to Him in humility, the same humility that He revealed in His lowly birth, then we receive the grace He so freely gives so that our lives may become what they were created to be.

The Christmas story can become one more cultural artifact, one more vestige of an ancient myth unless we seek to understand the profound mystery revealed in the Christmas crib. It is the mystery of love, the mystery of a profound grace made present among us. It is a universal story but it also becomes my story and your story when we take the time and the effort to prepare ourselves accordingly.

Affectionately, your Friend and Pastor,

The Deacon's Dais

As we begin Advent, it may be helpful for us to reflect a moment on the connection between our personal prayers and our participation in the Mass. During the season of Advent, we are to prepare ourselves for the coming of our King: the Word made Flesh.

Between the hustle and bustle of gift buying and travel planning, decorating and tree trimming, winterizing and shortened days... we will try to protect in our hearts the One for Whom we are preparing and recall why He came in the first place. We will say "Merry Christmas" and not "Happy Holidays;" we will offer extra prayers for our troops and all in distant places, as well as for those who have no one to pray for them during this special time of year.

Our Christian nature compels us to become more compassionate and thankful as we anticipate the high feasts of Christmas and Easter. We become more aware of Our Lord and His work in our lives. Because all of this is in the air, it is also on our hearts and minds.

Because Christmas is a very special day on the Christian Calendar, it deserves the four weeks of preparation. But notice how Advent helps us prepare for Christmas Day: by the constant reminders in our culture that Christmas is coming. In a similar way, personal prayer in preparation for Mass achieves that same state of mind. Unlike Christmas, we don't have the seasonal music playing in stores,

Kudos

To John Hagan for keeping the church grounds looking like the Boston Public Gardens.
To J.T. McConnell for spending a great deal of his very limited time to repairing our kneelers after the painting of the church interior.

the endless TV specials and the class plays at our children's schools to remind us of a Mass approaching. But we do have our personal prayers during the week that find their fulfillment in the Mass.

To be in prayer with God is to be in communion with God. We are not praying to a wall, an idea or something "spiritual." We are praying to the one, true, living God and He hears our prayer. This communion of prayer creates a yearning for its fullest expression this side of heaven: the Mass. And after participating in the glory of the Mass, we leave with the grace imbued by the meeting of God and Man, strengthened to go deeper in our personal prayers.

Thomas Merton wrote, "The early Christian tradition and the spiritual writers of the Middle Ages knew no conflict between "public " and "private" prayer, or between the liturgy and contemplation. This is a modern problem. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say it is a pseudo-problem. Liturgy by its very nature tends to prolong itself in individual contemplative prayer, and mental prayer in its turn disposes us for and seeks fulfillment in liturgical worship."

For the next twenty-four days every department store, special TV program and office party will remind us of something great that is coming. If we were to say a prayer at each of these reminders, then perhaps this habit of prayer leading to liturgy leading to deeper prayer will stay with us into Christmastide and beyond.

The Rev'd Deacon John Needham

Transitus

There were no Baptisms, Weddings or Funerals recorded in the Parish Register during the past month.

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but failed to do. Remember that in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats, the goats are judged by their failure to perform their Christian duty.

There are also two varieties of sin: venial sins, or sins rooted in our weakness as fallen humans, and mortal sins, or sins of deliberate willfulness. The Church recognizes that mortal sins are more serious than venial, for when we do something we know to be wrong, we alienate ourselves from God's love, leaving our soul in mortal jeopardy.

To prepare for either a first confession or one that encompasses many years, it's best to break up that time into categories, such as when I was at school, or in my first position of employment, and so forth, moving through the years to the present. What sins were prevalent in each of those categories? Is there a pattern of sinful behavior that emerges, our so-called besetting sins? Then as we look at the present, it's helpful to break that down into the past year, the past six months, the past month and so forth, again looking for both the obvious sins as well as their frequency.

At this point we may want to know what qualifies as a sin. There are several ways to approach this question, the most obvious being the use of the Ten Commandments. However, this is not necessarily the easiest form of self-examination as the categories of sin are rather broadly defined. A more accessible form is to look at the list of the seven deadly sins, especially when they are divided into narrower classes of sin. Perhaps the best form of self-examination in this category is in the S. Augustine's Prayer Book.

When we begin our self-examination, we must always begin with a prayer to the Holy Ghost that He will reveal to us those things that we may not want to see, or those things that we may not want to believe offend God but do. Then with paper and pen in hand, we begin to list those things that come to mind. All of them. It's up to our confessor, not us, to sort out what is or is not a sin. It's better to err on the side of thoroughness rather than make excuses to ourselves why this particular act or thought should not be included in our list.

As to what our confessor thinks of us... he is a sinner, too. A good confessor is in reality a good penitent who makes his own confession regularly. He knows that all sin separates us from God and that the only remedy for the penitent is to receive absolution, the grace of forgiveness. And by a mysterious grace, a confessor once having heard a confession and pronounced absolution will almost immediately forget what he heard as he prepares for the next penitent. This is a grace that saves both penitent and priest!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Weekly Bible Study: Wed, 10:45am

Our Bible Study meets after Morning Prayer at 9:30am and Mass at 10am. Please join us for our study of S. John's Gospel and bring your friends.

First Saturday Rosary: 5 Dec ,9:45am

We will meditate on the Luminous Mysteries this month. Please join us even if you have never prayed the Rosary before. Rosaries and prayers are available at the Lady Shrine.

Christian Formation: Sundays, 9:30am

In December, we will review our history and theology in "Anglicanism 101." This class is strongly recommended for all who are new to the parish or who would not be prepared to "give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." *1 Peter 3:15*

Wednesday Night at the Movies:

On Wednesday 16 December we will meet at 7pm to watch and discuss the film, "Joyeux Noel." Here is the Netflix review: *As the French, Scottish and German soldiers prepare to open their presents on Christmas Eve, 1914, a momentous event occurs that changes the destinies of four people: an Anglican priest, a French lieutenant, a world-class tenor and his soprano lover. Diane Kruger, Benno Furmann, Guillaume Canet, Gary Lewis, Dany Boon and Daniel Bruhl co-star in this heartwarming World War I-era tale inspired by a true story.*

The Feast of the Nativity: 25 Dec.

As has become our practice, we will celebrate Our Lord's birth with A Service of Nine Lessons & Carols at 6pm Christmas Eve, followed by Midnight Mass beginning at 11pm. On Christmas Day, Masses will be at 8am & 11am.

December 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 feria	2 St Bibiana, VM M.P. 9.30am Mass 10am Bible Study 10:45 E.P. 5.30pm	3 St Francis Xavier, C (feria) M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm	4  St Peter Chrysologus, BCD M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm	5 feria M.P. 9.30am Rosary 9.45am E.P. 5.30pm
6  ADVENT II (St. Nicholas, BC) M.P. 9.00am SCF 9.30am Mass 10.30am	7 St Ambrose, BCD M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm	8  IMMACULATE CONCEPTION M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm Mass 7pm	9 Octave (feria) M.P. 9.30am Mass 10am Bible Study 10:45 E.P. 5.30pm	10 Octave (feria) M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm	11  St Damasus I (Octave) M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm	12 Our Lady of Guadalupe M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm
13  ADVENT III (St Lucy, VM) M.P. 9.00am SCF 9.30am Mass 10.30am	14 Octave M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm	15 Octave Day M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm	16 Ember Day M.P. 9.30am Mass 10am Bible Study 10:45 E.P. 5.30pm WVNM 7.00pm	17 feria M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm	18  Ember Day (feria) M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm	19 Ember Day (feria) (vigil) M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm
20  ADVENT IV M.P. 9.00am SCF 9.30am Mass 10.30am	21 St Thomas, APM M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm Mass 7pm	22 feria M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm	23 feria M.P. 9.30am Mass 10am Bible Study 10:45 E.P. 5.30pm	24 VIGIL M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm L & C 6.00pm Carols 10.30pm Mass 11pm	25  NATIVITY OF OUR LORD Mass 8am Mass 10am	26 St Stephen, Protomartyr M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm
27  ST JOHN, APEV M.P. 9.00am SCF 9.30am Mass 10.30am	28  HOLY INNOCENTS M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm Mass 7pm	29 St Thomas of Canterbury M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm	30 Octave M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm	31 St Sylvester, PC (Octave) M.P. 9.30am E.P. 5.30pm		

Ab=Abbot; Ap=Apostle; B=Bishop; C=Confessor; Dn=Deacon; D=Doctor; Ev=Evangelist; K=King; M=Martyr; P=Pope; Pn=Penitent Pr=Priest; Q=Queen; V=Virgin; W=Widow; SCF=School of Christian Formation; SOC=Stations of the Cross; WVNM=Wednesday Night at the Movies

The Manhattan Declaration

The following was released 20 November by notable Evangelical, Orthodox and Roman Catholic churchman. Precipitated by what they believe to be an all-out assault on Christianity within the Western culture, these church leaders crossed denomination barriers to issue the following statement. To learn more about this courageous act, go to www.manhattandeclaration.org to read the full Declaration. You will also have the opportunity to add your name to the growing list of Christians who support the Declaration.

A Call of Christian Conscience

Christians, when they have lived up to the highest ideals of their faith, have defended the weak and vulnerable and worked tirelessly to protect and strengthen vital institutions of civil society, beginning with the family.

We are Orthodox, Catholic, and evangelical Christians who have united at this hour to reaffirm fundamental truths about justice and the common good, and to call upon our fellow citizens, believers and non-believers alike, to join us in defending them. These truths are:

1. the sanctity of human life
2. the dignity of marriage as the conjugal union of husband and wife
3. the rights of conscience and religious liberty.

Inasmuch as these truths are foundational to human dignity and the well-being of society, they are inviolable and non-negotiable. Because they are increasingly under assault from powerful forces in our culture, we are compelled today to speak out forcefully in their defense, and to commit ourselves to honoring them fully no matter what pressures are brought upon us and our institutions to abandon or compromise them. We make this commitment not as partisans of any political group but as followers of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

A Look at the Liturgy

In introducing the traditional Western Canon of the Mass (the Gregorian Rite) several months back, I mentioned that the practice of The Sacrament of Penance was not only assumed throughout the Church, but was, in fact, widely practiced. And this was true not only in the Western but in the Eastern Church as well. The evidence of history demonstrates that Christians took sin seriously until the advent of modern psychology. Since then, we have fallen into the habit of making excuses for our behavior rather than accepting that we often willfully disregard God's expressed will for our lives.

Probably the greatest obstacle to becoming a penitent is to accept the fact that our behavior actually does grieve the heart of God and is an affront to Him. But once we are willing to see sin from God's perspective, then we face a second obstacle, namely, how to go about making our auricular confession. Coupled with this is a fear of what our confessor will think of us should we make a full and honest confession.

First, a couple of helpful definitions may be in order. Sin is any failure or refusal to do what God has expressly willed for us, either through Scripture or the teachings of the Church. There are both sins of commission, such as the things we actively engage in, and sins of omission, those things that we ought to have done

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