

December 2009



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**And the Word  
Was made Flesh  
And dwells  
Among us**



## Prepare the Way of the Lord

**\*NEW THIS YEAR\***

All four Mondays during Advent, we will have **Advent Taizé Prayer** at 7:00 P.M., in the Gathering Space. During this busy time with family Christmas preparations, we invite you take a half hour each week to spend some time preparing a space in your heart for the coming of the Christ Child. The prayer tradition of Taizé, based on the monastic Hours of prayer each day, can help us let go of our own preoccupations and get in touch with spiritual realities.

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### **The Feast of the Immaculate Conception – a Holy Day of Obligation**

*Tuesday, December 8*

Masses at 8:00 A.M. and 7:00 P.M.

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### **Advent Lessons and Carols**

*Sunday, December 13, 4:00 P.M.*

Lessons and Carols is a traditional Advent service originating in England, consisting of lessons (scripture readings) interspersed with songs and prayers. This is St. Mary's eleventh year of Lessons and Carols, and it has become a beloved tradition. Please join us for this communal prayer and worship.



### **Parish Christmas Open House**

*Sunday, December 13, 5:00 P.M.*

Immediately following our celebration of Lessons and Carols, we gather for another annual St. Mary tradition as we move to the festively decorated gathering space. Good food and the lively company of the parish family promise to make it a memorable Christmas party.

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### **Advent Reconciliation and Taize Prayer**

*Friday, December 18, 7:00 P.M.*

We have combined the meditational beauty of Taize music and prayer with the Sacrament of Reconciliation, creating an opportunity for a peaceful time of reflection on our readiness for the coming of our Lord.

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### **Christmas Masses**

*Thursday, December 24, Christmas Eve  
Celebration Masses*

5:00 P.M. (Includes the Children's Choir)

9:00 P.M. (Hymns and Carols at 8:30 P.M.  
with the Traditional Choir)

*Friday, December 25*

9:30 A.M. (Contemporary Choir)

11:00 A.M. (Traditional Choir)

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### **New Year's Masses – The Feast of Mary, Mother of God (Holy Day of Obligation)**

*Thursday, December 31 – 5:00 P.M.*

*Friday, January 1 – 9:30 and 11:00 A.M.*

# Sing of Mary Pure and Spotless

## Hours

In her explanation of our Taize prayers, Dianne Fox tells us they are based on the monastic Hours. You might be hazy as to the meaning of this. The Hours harken back to the early days of the Church, when St. Benedict ordered his monks to pray according to a rigorous schedule. The monks rose in the middle of the night to chant the first of the Hours and prayed according to this schedule:

### Vigils

(sometime during the night)

### Matins (Lauds)

(at sunrise)

### Prime

(during the first hour of daylight)

### Terce

(9:00 A.M.)

### Sext

(noon)

### None

(3:00 P.M.)

### Vespers

(at the end of the work day)

### Compline—bedtime

Fr. Anselm explained that the modern Benedictine monks do not observe all the Hours. "At St. Meinrad, Vigils begins at 5:30 A.M. (7:15 on Sundays), followed immediately by Lauds. Midday Prayer is at noon, Vespers at 5:00 P.M., and Compline, I believe, is now at 9 P.M."

December 8 is the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Many people, mostly non-Catholics, but a few Catholics also, believe it is the feast day celebrating the virgin conception of Jesus by Mary. But that is incorrect. The feast of the Immaculate Conception celebrates the ancient Christian belief that Mary was conceived free of original sin, or to use the terms of Eastern Catholic theology, Mary was born free of the inclination to sin which is a result of the Fall of Adam and Eve.

This belief was first stated in the second century with the teaching that Mary is the New Eve, the Woman who reverses the disobedience of Eve by her obedience to God. As Adam and Eve sinned, resulting in the sinful inclination of their descendants, Christ and Mary were wholly obedient to the will of God because they were born free of the inclinations originating with Adam and Eve. This view of Mary's role in salvation history is frequently found in early Christian scholarly writing.

The early Christians, building on this teaching, were effusive in singing Mary's praises as the new Eve, perfectly sinless. The famous Scripture Alexandrian scholar Origen (c.230 AD) calls her worthy of God, immaculate of the immaculate, the most complete sanctity, perfect righteousness, neither deceived by the persuasiveness of the serpent, nor infected by his poisonous exhalations. Maximus of Turin calls her a dwelling fit for Christ, not because of any bodily habits, but because of her original [divine] gift.

Theodotus of Ancyra calls her an innocent virgin, without spot, void of culpability, holy in body and in soul, a lily among thorns, untaught in the evil habits of Eve, for in her there was no intermingling of light and darkness, and, when not yet born, she was consecrated to God.

Similarly, in the Syriac speaking East, the early writers praise Mary's sinlessness. For example, the famous hymnist Ephraim the Syrian tells us that Mary was "as innocent as Eve before her fall, a virgin completely removed from every blemish of sin, more holy than the Seraphim [highest angels], the

sealed fountain of the Holy Spirit, the pure seed of God, ever in body and in mind intact and immaculate." (*Carmina Nisibena*).

Writings of early Christians on the sinlessness of Mary abound, and although feasts of the Conception of the Virgin Mary were celebrated by the eighth century by both the Eastern (Byzantine) and Western (Latin) church, and the Western church changed the name of the feast to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary in the eleventh century, formal declarations of this belief were slow in coming.

Why, then, was this process delayed to the point that this belief was not formally declared by the Church until the nineteenth century? From about the 1000-1700, theologians and scholars of the Church discussed and debated the possible meanings of this belief. Among the interpretations which were rejected at the end of this centuries-long process, were the beliefs that Mary

was created sinless before her conception or that she was cleansed of original sin following her conception. The first explanation assumed the pre-existence of Mary, a doctrine occasionally taught in heretical circles, but not by the Church. The second explanation would have meant that Mary was conceived in original sin, that her human nature would have been tainted by evil inclinations, again a view rejected by centuries of Christian teaching. The doctrinal formulation settled upon and accepted by the bishops of the Church, was that Mary was preserved free of sin at the moment of conception.

In 1854, Pius IX, speaking in his office as Bishop of Rome and in consensus with the bishops of the church, solemnly declared and formally defined the infallible statement *Ineffabilis Deus*:

***"The most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception,***

***by a singular grace and privilege granted by almighty God,***

***in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the saviour of the human race,***

***was preserved free from all stain of original sin."***

—Bill Murphy



***Many people have a misconception of the Immaculate Conception, not realizing that it refers to Mary's sinlessness from birth.***

# Sharing Christmas with Jewish Friends

Often, our Jewish friends believe we have forgotten the true meaning of Christmas, the gift of God's love and salvation. They see the holly, tinsel, songs, carols, gift giving, Christmas cards, and parties that seem to commercialize Christmas.

It is difficult for our Jewish friends to disassociate themselves completely from Christmas. They are bombarded by its commercialism, and yet they feel isolated or left out. Christmas is not their holiday. For some, it is the Gentile Holiday; others feel threatened by the public emphasis on Christ and worry that it might increase the level of anti-Semitism. Some will participate in Christmas festivities as long as their personal belief is not compromised. And what does a Jewish family do when their children ask, "Why don't we celebrate Christmas?"

The gap in the relationship between Christians and Jews is very obvious at Christmas. Bridging the gap is a sensitive issue. Hanukah helps somewhat with a completely Jewish celebration. It has the lighting of festival lights and the exchange of gifts. Both Christmas and Hanukah are occasions for gift giving, but they have nothing in common beyond that.

Sharing is always a good way to let our Jewish friends know that we care about

them and want to include them in our joy. We must, however, recognize their feelings while sharing as much as we can, or as much as we feel they're ready to accept. An exchange of Season's Greetings is always welcome; select a non-religious motif. One can send a gift and refer to it as a late Hanukah gift or a New Year's gift. An invitation to a family dinner might be in order, or an invitation to a Christmas party, but not a party that includes the singing of religious carols. Our Jewish friends will enjoy singing White Christmas, The Christmas Song, Jingle Bells – all written by Jewish songwriters. One could ask a good Jewish friend to Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. The invitation may be accepted, or you could receive a polite refusal. A dinner invitation might be easier to accept where the atmosphere is warm, friendly, and easier to handle.

The more sensitive we are about our Jewish friends' feelings, the more we can help them relate to the holiday more comfortably. So if you think your Jewish friend or neighbor feels "left out" at Christmas, invite and include them in love and friendship. And whether they accept or not, they will appreciate your thoughtfulness.

**Merry Christmas to All!**

—Maura Canavan



## Christmas Concert

A special Christmas concert has been added to our fundraiser series. On Sunday, December 27, at 4:00 P.M., a family concert will be held in the church. Favorites like "Frosty" and "Rudolf" will join familiar carols in a concert suitable for all ages.

Ticket prices are \$25 for a family of four, or \$10 per adult and \$5 per child. Each admission includes a post-concert reception of holiday treats.

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Vol. 19, No. 4, December, 2009. The Voice of St. Mary's is published monthly, except bimonthly in May/June and July/August, by St. Mary's Parish, 1012 Lake St, Evanston, IL 60201.

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## Angels Return

On Christmas Eve, the Art and Environment Committee promises the angels will make their yearly appearance. Most Christians are familiar with three of our seven angels because of their mention in the Bible. Michael appears in Daniel (12:1) and Gabriel in Luke (1:26). Raphael may be less well known because of his appearance only in the relatively unknown Book of Tobit (12:15), but he is a literary figure because of his presence in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

But where did the A & E creators get Uriel, Sariel, Raguel, and Jeremiel? It turns out that Uriel pops up in 2 Esdras (4:1). Legend also has him coming to the rescue of the Infant John the Baptist, in the time of Jesus, and checking the Israelites' doors for the blood of the lamb, in the time of Moses.

Sariel is not mentioned by name in the Book of Revelation but is believed to be the angel to the church at Sardis (3:1). Jeremiel, another of the archangels, is mentioned in 4 Esdras as the one who answers the questions of the dead concerning their future at the day of the last judgment; thus Jeremiel expresses by his very name the hope for the future exaltation of the dead righteous ones.



# Diversity Dinner



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