



Dear Parishioners,

The submission of bulletins for publication has been moved up this year and as I write this I'm attempting to shift mental gears from the 3rd Sunday of Advent to the 4th Sunday of Advent and Christmas (*and it's only December 9th*).

In light of the last nine months under the effects of COVID-19, it's hard to believe that Christmas is upon us once again. I noticed decorations up and lit very early this year. I'm sure celebrations will be a bit different this year as COVID has impacted every aspect of our lives. But Christmas is about more than presents, decorations, and gatherings. Christmas celebrates more than the birth of a baby. Christmas is a feast of salvation announcing to us that the glory of the Lord is upon us. Christmas calls us to open ourselves to God's glory so that it may shine.

There is perhaps no other Gospel story that has been told and retold in so many thousands of ways as this one about the birth of Jesus. Much about it piques our imaginations and quickens our hearts. It is an easy story to tell with lots of characters: a Mom, a Dad, a newborn baby, angels, shepherds, sheep, donkeys, and cattle ... and later on, camels, kings, and gifts. We empathize with the hardship of Mary and Joseph: "*no room for them in the inn,*" giving birth to a "*firstborn son*" in a place less than hospitable and having to use a manger for crib. These picturesque and memorable details, however, can limit our appreciation for what we really celebrate. Christmas is less about the birth of a baby and far more about the birth of a divine Savior. It is less about glory and joy of long ago and more about an invitation to us today to enter into the saving mystery of God revealed so uniquely in Jesus Christ. It is less about drama and more about the nitty-gritty challenge of living daily in the mystery of God among us.

Christmas calls us to give the most important gift of all – the very Life of God – *to one another*. We have been given the Gift of Jesus, now we share this Gift with others as we continue our life journey. Christmas calls us to open our eyes and to see where we ourselves can bring the joy and peace of salvation to those around us even in spite of the COVID pandemic. Indeed, the greatest gift we can give others is God's glory ... God's Presence.

Christmas affords many opportunities for us to be God's glory through Jesus Christ for others. Most of us go out of our way to be generous to the poor and less fortunate at this time, especially so that the drudgery and worry of not having enough might be allayed at least for a little while. We must also open our eyes to those near and dear to us who might be lonely or depressed, struggling or drained, fearful or discouraged. Sometimes, like the shepherds, we need only to listen. Sometimes, like Joseph, we might accept without question. Sometimes, like Mary, we might say "yes" to what might be an unspoken request for help. Christmas is a salvation feast that happens every day. May we live our lives in such a way that the glory of God within us shines forth, bringing light into darkness ... hope into desperation ... and peace into discord.

It is my prayer and wish that you and yours have a Happy, Holy, and Blessed Christmas and Christmas Season! May you also have a Happy, Healthy, and Safe New Year! May Saint Michael the Archangel defend, guide, protect, and intercede for us always! May the love of God which took human form in the person of Jesus be honored and revered in every person you meet. Be an ambassador for Christ this holiday season and wish people a **Merry Christmas!**

~ Fr. Larry