

ISSUE NO. 122

22 DECEMBER 2019

Cathedral

WEEKLY



FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DRAWING NEAR | FR. CHRISTOPHER HOUSE

IS THIS THE END OF THE CHRISTMAS SEASON OR THE BEGINNING? | JOE HESCHMEYER

WHEN GOD DREW NEAR: ENTERING INTO THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS | MARK HART

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Cathedral WEEKLY

THE MOST REVEREND THOMAS JOHN PAPROCKI
NINTH BISHOP
OF SPRINGFIELD IN ILLINOIS

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Mass Times: SAT 4PM, SUN. 7AM, 10AM, 5PM
Weekday Masses: MON. thru FRI. 7AM, 5:15PM and SAT. 8AM
Reconciliation (Confessions): MON-FRI 4:15PM- 5PM, SAT. 9AM-10AM,
2:30PM-3:30PM, and SUN. 4PM-4:45PM
Adoration: Tuesdays & Thursdays 4PM to 5PM

Diocesan Victim Assistance is available. For the Diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator, please contact: Patricia Kornfield at 321-1155.

Please remember that if you or a loved one is in the hospital, a nursing home or home-bound, to contact the Parish offices or Sr. Francella at 522-3342 x 142. Hospitals may know you are Catholic, but not know you are from Cathedral. We would be happy to visit.

Welcome to the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception!

On behalf of our bishop, the Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki, our parishioners, deacons, and priests, I welcome you to the mother church of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.

The seat of the diocese was moved to Springfield from Alton in 1923. In the same year, "Old St. Mary's" church of Immaculate Conception Parish was named as the pro-cathedral of the new diocese until this cathedral church was built and dedicated in 1928. Currently, our diocese comprises twenty-eight counties in central Illinois, serving over 140,000 members of the Catholic faithful.

I hope that your visit to our Cathedral is one of grace and beauty and that you feel at home in the mother church. I also hope that you will find this edition of the *Cathedral Weekly* to be both informative and spiritually enriching. May God bless you and yours!



Very Reverend Christopher A. House
Rector

Mass Intentions for the Upcoming Week

Monday – December 23

7 AM MARY ANN MIDDEN (WILLIAM MIDDEN)
5:15PM EULALIA & RAYMOND OHL (ANGELA OHL-MARSTERS)

Tuesday – December 24

4 PM FOR THE PEOPLE
7 PM KYLE BUCKMAN (MOM)

Wednesday – December 25

12:00 AM JOHN & EDITH BAKALAR (JOHN BUSCIACCO)
9:00 AM BARBRA MCGEE (TOM MCGEE)

Thursday – December 26

7 AM DORIS DREA (MIKE & KAREN RELLIHAN)
5:15 PM NO MASS

Friday – December 27

7AM ERIC GUNTHER (DIANE, JIM & RUBY MILLER)
5:15PM BONNIE DONNALS (C. CUNNINGHAM)

Saturday – December 28

8 AM SOPHIA E. BARTOLETTI (BARTOLETTI FAMILY)
4 PM ROY F. RHODES (RHODES FAMILY)

Sunday – December 29

7 AM MARY ANN MIDDEN (WILLIAM MIDDEN)
10 AM FOR THE PEOPLE
5 PM SPECIAL INTENTION FOR THE HOLY FAMILY
(John Busciacco)



Drawing Near

The Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Advent always prepares us for the celebration of Christmas. This year we hear the story of the Annunciation to St. Joseph, where God, through his angel, calls on Joseph to not be afraid and to welcome Mary, and through her, Jesus, into his home.

Throughout Advent we have been reminded that just as the Lord Jesus came to us in time, so he will also return to us at time's end. He also draws near to us in many and varied ways each day; the most common and wonderful way in which he does this is in and through the people we encounter daily. Dorothy Day once wrote

"If everyone were holy and handsome, with 'alter Christus' shining in neon lighting from them, it would be easy to see Christ in everyone. If Mary had appeared in Bethlehem clothed, as St. John says, with the sun, a crown of twelve stars on her head, and the moon under her feet, then people would have fought to make room for her. But that was not God's way for her, nor is it Christ's way for himself, now when he is disguised under every type of humanity that treads the earth."



May we open our hearts to the grace of God that allows us to see him drawing near to us, especially in our sisters and brothers.

On behalf of Bishop Paprocki, Fathers Friedel and Rankin, Deacons Smith and Keen, and everyone on the parish staff, I want to wish you and yours a Blessed and Merry Christmas. May the light of the Christ Child enable us to see him in those around us and lead all the world to greater peace and joy. God bless you!

Father Christopher House is the Rector of the Cathedral and serves in various leadership roles within the diocesan curia, namely Chancellor and Vicar Judicial.

Stewardship Activity

Stewardship of Prayer:

Take some time this week to pray for those who are lonely, isolated, disadvantaged, sick, or those without the comfort of a loved one during this season.

Stewardship of Service:

This week, as you enter into the Christmas Season, keep in mind those serving around you. The Cathedral could not be a warm, welcoming, and hospitable place without the staff and volunteers! If you see someone offering hospitality or service, thank them for their service!

Stewardship of Gifts

Stewardship of Treasure December 14th & 15th

Envelopes:	\$6,255.57
Loose:	\$1,656.56
Maintenance:	\$34.00

Total: \$7,946.13
November EFT \$19,650.30

*Did you know you can make a gift online? If you would like to extend a special gift to the Cathedral during this upcoming season go to <https://spicathedral.org/give-online/>. We appreciate your generosity!



Is this the End of the Christmas Season or the Beginning?

Terry Mattingly of GetReligion has a great column about the “two Christmases.” As he notes, for the Church, the Christmas season runs from Christmas Day

(December 25) to Epiphany (January 6). These are the famous Twelve Days of Christmas. But in secular society, the Christmas season runs from around Thanksgiving until December 25. So this Sunday marks either the end of the Christmas season (for secular culture), or the First Day of Christmas (for the Church).

It’s an important difference, and one in which he notes many Christians tend to side with the world, rather than the Church:

“Unfortunately, most Americans — especially evangelical Protestants — have so distanced themselves from any awareness of the Christian calendar that their decisions about that kind of question have been handed over to the culture,”

said the Rev. Russell D. Moore, dean of the theology school at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.



Many evangelicals fear the “cold formalism” they associate with churches that follow the liturgical calendar, and the result, he said, is *“no sense of what happens when in the Christian year, at all.”* Thus, instead of celebrating ancient feasts such as Epiphany, Pentecost, and the Transfiguration, far too many American church calendars are limited to Christmas and Easter, along with cultural festivities such as Mother’s Day, the Fourth of July, Halloween, Thanksgiving and the Super Bowl.

As the piece notes, this is particularly problematic for Evangelicals, but I think we Catholics can be guilty of this, too.

The Difference Between the Two Christmases

For the world, what we’ve just gone through was the Christmas season, and it’s tied to (at best) being nice, and making time for family and friends, or (at worst) non-stop marketing, shopping, and fighting off loneliness and despair with a credit card.

This Wednesday marks the end of the world’s Christmas season, because this is the climax of their efforts. This is the day when we come together and share all of those presents, and where we take some time off of work to be with our families. Once the presents are opened, and our families have started to annoy us again, it’s back to our ordinary routines. Santa Claus, the central figure of this Christmas, is already gone by Christmas morning.

But for the Church, this Wednesday should mark a beginning, not an end. It marks Christ’s advent into the world where, for the first time, we could behold the Savior of the World in the Flesh, as the rich and the poor, the Magi and the shepherds alike, fall to their knees. The period we just went through wasn’t the Christmas season, because Christ hadn’t come yet. It was the Advent season, in which we’ve prepared for Christ’s coming.

The Catechism explains that in Advent, the Church

“makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior’s first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming. By celebrating the precursor’s birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his desire: ‘He must

increase, but I must decrease.’”

Just as you tidy up for a party, and tidy up a lot for an important party, the birthday of Christ himself, his visit to each and every one of us, should motivate us to clean house. And cleaning house involves throwing out our old sins, and making space for Christ to come in.

With this view, Christ is our guest, and we want him to stay with us forever. So December 25 celebrates his arrival, and we savor this arrival in a special way for days, culminating on either January 6 (the traditional date of the Feast of the Epiphany), Epiphany Sunday (the nearest Sunday to January 6), or even Candlemas (February 2, for those cultures that really like Christmastime).

Continued from p. 5

Continued from p. 4

In a nutshell, here's what I'd say are the two most important differences between the liturgical calendar and the secular one:

1. One makes Christmas something we do for Christ, while the other makes it something he does for us. The world's version focuses on our efforts (our shopping, caroling, and the like), while the Church's version focuses on Christ's entry.
2. The world's view of the Christmas season is largely without Christ. That is, all but the last day are a celebration of something we're calling "Christmas," without the Nativity. What exactly are we celebrating December 25 that's different than what we were celebrating, say, December 20? By de-emphasizing the utter centrality of the Nativity to Christmas, the focus starts to come off of Christ. Whether it's shifted towards family or shopping, that shift's still a disaster.

As Mattingly notes, this has hit Evangelicals the hardest. With a cultural suspicion of Advent and the whole notion of "liturgical seasons," Evangelicals end up turning to the world for their seasons and holidays. The most shocking example (at least to me) was my discovery that when Christmas falls on a Sunday, many Evangelical churches simply cancel church services. In 2011, when Christmas was on a Sunday, David Gibson reported for the *Wall Street Journal*: "Nearly 10% of Protestant churches will be closed on Christmas Sunday this year (2014), according to LifeWay Research, and most pastors who are opening up say they expect far fewer people than on other Sundays. Other reports suggest that churches across the board are scaling down their services in anticipation of fewer worshippers."

'We have to face the reality of families who don't want to struggle to get kids dressed and come to church,' Brad Jernberg of Dallas's Cliff Temple Baptist Church told the Associated Baptist Press. Similarly, Beth Car Baptist Church in Halifax, Va., is planning a short service featuring bluegrass riffs on Christmas music. 'I'll do a brief sermon, and then we're going home,' said Pastor Mike Parnell."

I suppose that this avoids the risk that worshipping God would get in the way of the purpose of secular-Christmas... to be with your family.

The Real War on Christmas

The secular "Christmas" season is a time of strife, with the

infamous "war on Christmas" specials that Fox runs annually. But the real "war on Christmas" that we should be worried about is the one I just described, the internal destruction of Christmas by Christians.

Let me give two examples of what I mean here. The first one involves a dispute over whether or not two bus drivers were allowed to decorate their buses with Christmas decorations. One of the bus drivers defended the decorations by saying, "This is totally not a religious thing. This is about Christmas." Yikes. This should be a wake-up call for Christians who want Christmas to be, you know, about Christ. We should be uncomfortable with both sides of the "war on Christmas": those who want Christmas stamped out of public life, and those who want Christmas hollowed out into something harmless to secularist.

The second example is a more general one: the ongoing debate over whether we should say "Merry Christmas!" or "Happy Holidays!" Reality check: the word "holiday" is just a shortened form of "holy day." Christmas is a holiday, Fourth of July is not (hopefully).

But "holiday" has come to mean simply "vacation," because that's how we treat our holidays. This is most obvious in the UK, where vacationing (anytime of year) is often described as "going on holiday." But we Americans are guilty of it as well. If we weren't, we wouldn't be so upset about the phrase "Happy Holidays," because it'd be a religious phrase.

If "Happy Holidays" has been sterilized to the point that secularists have no

trouble using it, well, that's partly our own fault.

So if this Wednesday is to be an end, let it be an end to the secular celebration of "Christmastime" one and for all. Take this Christmas as an opportunity to start fresh by welcoming Christ as your guest both for the day, and for the Christmas season, and forever.

Joe Heschmeyer is an instructor at the Holy Family School of Faith Institute for the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, and blogs at Shameless Popery. This article first appears online at: <https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/blog/is-this-the-end-of-the-christmas-season-or-the-beginning/20006/>





When God Drew Near: Entering into the Joy of Christmas

Swaddled tightly beneath a star-blanketed Bethlehem sky, God breathed with gentle power. The acceptable time had come. The prophecies were now—at last—fulfilled. The Creator had “entered” creation on a mission of love, and for the next three decades, peace and joy were inhaled and received in tangible new ways.

That Christmas night, the divine life of God was communicated through a tiny human breath. Put simply, God breathed not solely so that he might live but that we would. It’s fascinating how something so small like a breath forms the line between life and death. The Latin word for breath *inspirare* is where we get the term “inspiration;” it literally means, “to breathe [life] into.” Inspiration, however, is far more than a biological word or concept, it is a deeply spiritual reality. God’s inspiration animates our Christian souls, guides our steps, and offers us both a mission and a purpose.

We often talk about how the Bible is the “inspiration”—the breath—of the Holy Spirit; how the Word of God was recorded through the pens of men. But, have you ever stopped to consider how vital this inspiration of God is to our faith and, indeed, our lives as Catholics? The Church is inspired, the sacraments are inspired and—with any luck—with every encounter we witness on the pages of Sacred Scripture, we, too, are inspired. We breathe in God’s life (grace) not that we would hold it in, but that we might share it.

Inspiration leads to respiration.

Since you began reading this, you’ve probably taken between twenty and thirty breaths. We know, of course, that inspiration is not only vital for our bodies but also for our souls. It’s when we realize how desperately we need oxygen that we come to appreciate it more.

It’s how our story began, after all (or, “before all” if you want to get technical). Life began because God spoke; he breathed the Word (Genesis 1:3) and creation spun into existence. It was when God breathed life into Adam, however, that things got even more interesting (Genesis 2:7): creation now bore the ability to inspire, to procreate life in God’s image. And at that very first Christmas, beside that majestic manger, the new Adam was swaddled tightly by the new Eve. Heaven breathed. God had drawn near in an even more intimate way than in Eden. The Savior’s exhale announced the coming Kingdom. Heaven came to earth to bring earth back to heaven.

As your eyes take in the crèche this year, allow the Holy Spirit to inspire you, again. Gaze upon these incredible figures immersed in the beautiful reality that is our Christmas story. Ponder these realities in your heart as the Blessed Mother did (Luke 2:19). Consider what each character represents and how they were led

to this holy night—heroic characters, timeless tales—all immersed in heart-stopping and soul-stirring moments beside the manger. How ironic that the reality of the Christmas story brings us life by taking our breath away.

As you look forward to the Christmas season, recall your own journey that brought you to this place. For just as the light increased within our Advent wreaths each week, the Light now enters to eclipse the darkness of our world, our homes, and our hearts. Throughout this past Advent season the daily readings reminded us that life’s greatest blessings are often born out of its greatest struggles. For those souls reading this who feel immersed in stress, loneliness or darkness this year, especially, remember now that our Emmanuel has come, “God is (indeed) with us” (Matthew 1:23).

At first glance, Mary’s experience of Christ’s birth seems to be shrouded in more darkness than light. Consider these moments from St. Luke’s Gospel: A teenage virgin is pregnant, but not with her husband-to-be’s child. The girl then leaves home for three months; later, in her third trimester of pregnancy, she leaves home again and travels roughly ninety miles by donkey. She gives birth in a cave and, soon after, hears from a prophet that both she and her child will suffer greatly. Most people would not consider these mysterious moments very “joyful.” Prayerful reflection on the mysteries, however, reveals a cause for intense joy. God was on a rescue mission to save us, and that mission included courageous souls fighting through incredibly challenging situations. Not only do the Joyful Mysteries walk us more deeply into the conception, birth, and childhood years of our Lord Jesus, but they also reveal to us a God who is madly in love with us, a God who will stop at nothing to save all of us from sin and death.

The Christmas mystery—the mystery of the Incarnation—invites us to active prayer. God emptied himself and took on flesh. This is beautiful, not only because of the humility and gentleness of the baby in the manger, but because of his invitation to interact with him physically and intimately. The entire Nativity scene is a celebration of God’s love for his children; his willingness to stop at nothing to ensure our salvation. It’s a scene that we must prayerfully engage in, not just passively “admire.” Never forget that the Lord didn’t come to be admired but worshipped. We should fall on our knees this night, as they did so many centuries ago, breathe in his peace and joy, and worship the God who loved us enough to be born into the world’s brokenness and sin to save us from it.

Mark Hart has helped transform Catholic youth and young adult Scripture study in parishes, homes, and classrooms with his wildly popular Bible study programs. A devoted husband and father of four, Mark’s humor and his passion for Scripture are helping hundreds of thousands of Catholics, young and old, begin to read and study the Bible in engaging, fun, and relevant ways. His latest project with Ascension, The 99, will offer parishes a new system for evangelization.

This Christmas, Witness God's Presence All Around

Every Christmas for nearly 30 years, my husband's mother sent new Christmas ornaments to us and the children. There are creamy white Belleek castles and shamrocks and angels; engraved brass Christmas trees and stars; large globes covered with family artwork – enough to start the kids off on their own trees when it's time.

This year, Mom couldn't give us our ornaments even though she'd picked them out. Suzanne Christmyer passed away soon after Thanksgiving, having lived a long full life and loved by her children and grandchildren. She was nearly 90.

If you've lost a family member, you know what it's like going into the holidays. They leave a life-sized hole that sometimes seems as solid as they were, alive. I never thought much about those ornaments or what they'd mean, but last week as I took them out, unwrapped them one by one and hung them on the tree, they brought a rush of memories. I felt her presence, heard her laugh, remembered how much she loved us all. In that room by the tree, it's as if she's with us still.

"With us" is the gift God gave us on the first Christmas. We were as good as dead to him, but he didn't want to lose us. He wanted us to know how much he loves us. Not just after our time on earth, which is how long we have to wait to see our loved ones, but now. Here are just some of the situations in which God is with us, according to his Word:

When we're afraid: *"Be strong and of good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."* – Joshua 1:9

When we're in trouble: *"Be strong and of good courage, do not fear or be in dread of them: for it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you."* – Deuteronomy 31:6

When we feel abandoned or weak: *"I have chosen you and not cast you off; fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand."* – Isaiah 41:9b-10

When we're persecuted: *"The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has cast out your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear evil no more."* – Zephaniah 3:15

When we're sad or near death: *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me."* – Psalm 23:4

Not only does he promise to be with us, we can't get away from him and no one and nothing can get between us!

"Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." – Psalm 139:7-10

"For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." – Romans 8:38-39

If you're feeling far from God this week in spite of Christmas, curl up by the tree with your Bible and read some of these other ways God is with you and the things He will do for you: John 14:16-17, Zephaniah 3:17, Isaiah 57:15, Exodus 33:13-14.

"I'm with you always, to the close of the age" Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 28:20. And he has said, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you!"* As you celebrate the coming of Emmanuel, may you experience God's presence in a very special way.



Sarah Christmyer is a writer for Ascension Presents Blog. This article first appeared here: <http://media.ascensionpress.com/2015/12/22/christmas-witness-gods-presence-around/>

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