

TIDINGS

OF HOLY NAME OF JESUS NATIONAL CATHOLIC PARISH

A Monthly Newsletter of Information and Events

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Month of December

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Christmas and the Sanctity of Our World

I have been attending sporadically a Jewish Midrash and myth Bible study group at Schoen Books here in South Deerfield on Wednesday evenings. The group has extended an invitation to me and has been wonderfully patient with my ignorance of the Hebrew terminology and teachers. I have found it extremely interesting to hear readings of the same texts that I have read since I was a child in a wholly different light, and maybe most amazingly of all is that I have found the readings enlightening to my Christian faith in an unexpected way. Sometimes as Christians we may approach the Old Testament with an air of condescension based upon the belief that we know a fuller meaning of the text than its original recipients because we recognize that it all points to the coming of Jesus as the Messiah.

I thank my teachers of the historical-critical method of Old Testament study, Fr. Michael Barone and Rev. Bruce Dahlburg, for helping me to read these books in their own right. These Midrash classes have helped me to deepen that insight. The closest parallel I can offer is that Midrash treats the biblical word in similar fashion to Christian patristics. Midrash uses the inspired text as a springboard to further spiritual insight and theological exploration. It is some of these musings that have led me to a deeper appreciation of the Incarnation, of God's entrance into human history at Christmas.

Maimonides, the great Jewish philosopher of the 12th century, expounded on the idea of "good" as repeated numerous times in Genesis 1. He concluded that creation is good in and of itself. The goodness of what God has made is not dependent upon how it serves humans. Their goodness is intrinsic as made by God. He further stated that the repetition of the word implied that the whole of creation is good in a way that is greater than any isolated part of that creation could ever be alone.

Six hundred years later Shneur Zalman, again expounding on Genesis 1, speaks of God's creation of the dry land of the earth on the third day. Zalman believed that the earth manifested

the presence and power of God more than the rest of creation because it held the power to make things grow, and he found this in the verse: "Let the earth put forth vegetation ..." (1:11) The rest of creation is created by God, but the earth creates like God. Zalman imagined that God's radiance from on high shown down through all of existence, but that when it reached the bottom, the earth, it reflected back toward God through the earth's power to create. The presence and power of God, therefore, are most clearly expressed not only in the goodness of creation, but especially in the goodness of the miracle of the process of life.

Genesis is the creation story of the Jewish people. We have adopted it as our own, but it was born in the Jewish faith. I find it bothersome that Holy Scripture tells us of the inherent goodness of creation and also of the goodness of the process of life, and then some of the teachers of the church would insist that we profess instead that creation is inherently evil and that this evil is passed from generation to generation through the process of life. Zalman was fleeing from the armies of Napoleon and a certain death sentence when he wrote these words. He was not naïve. That the world is not perfect does not equate with the world is evil. That the world has been created by God, and has been called "good" by God, does mean that creation and life have been sanctified. The church does a disservice to this revelation when we insist on having people believe in original sin and all that accompanies it.

When God physically enters creation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, He testifies to the holiness of ordinary life. Christmas is a time to remember that the presence of God not only showers down upon us, but is reflected back towards God in the goodness of this creation. Perfection belongs to heaven, but Christmas reminds us that there are sparks of the divine, that there is hidden holiness, all around us. Being able to see that again is part of the joy and wonder of the season of Jesus' birth and one of God's greatest Christmas gifts to us all.

**CALENDAR OF EVENTS
MONTH OF DECEMBER**

- December 2, 2009 – Advent Marian Mass at 7:00pm.
December 4th – Monthly visitations to the sick and the shut-in of the parish
December 5th – Confession for the youth of the parish at 10:30am.
December 6th – Polish Mass will be recited at 7:45am.
December 8th – **FEAST OF DIVINE LOVE.** Mass of the day at 7:00pm.
December 10th – Monthly meeting of the Parish Committee at 7:00pm (Please note special day)
December 16th – Advent Penitential Service at 7:00pm.
December 20th – Volunteers will decorate the church for Christmas at 10:00am.
December 24th – **SHEPHERDS' MASS OF CHRISTMAS EVE** at 11:00pm.
December 25th – Mass of Christmas Day at 10:00am.
December 26th – Feast of St. Stephen. Mass of the day at 9:00am.
December 27th – **FEAST OF THE HUMBLE SHEPHERDS.** Mass at 9:00am, including the blessing and distribution of wine in honour of the Feast of St. John.
Special collection accepted after Mass for the seminary of our church.
Monthly meeting of the Adoration Society at 10:00am.
December 28th – Feast of the Holy Innocents. Mass of the day at 7:30am.
December 31st – Mass of thanksgiving on New Year's Eve at 6:00pm.

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NEW MEMBERS

On behalf of the parish, I wish to welcome Don & Charity Robinson, Amber Lovett and Brandi Lovett to Holy Name of Jesus. If you know someone who does not worship actively anywhere else, please invite them to come with you to Mass here at our church.

SEASON OF ADVENT

Advent began on Sunday, November 29th, and it will extend right up until we gather in church on Christmas Eve. Advent's four weeks offer us an alternative from the ridiculous pace and expectations of the world's Christmas preparations. The

world would have us prepare for Christmas with exhaustion and credit card bills. Advent says instead that we should prepare ourselves spiritually for the coming of the Christ Child. Think about the importance of God coming into our world as one of us. Appreciate that sense of expectation and excitement. Don't let Christmas arrive with a sense of relief. Let it be announced with a renewed sense of belief. Come to Mass on each of the Advent Sundays. Journey with the church through this time of anticipation and ever increasing light. Find time for charity in giving and in relationships. Make time for spiritual exercises outside of Mass. Advent is a gift. Accept it and appreciate it, and watch what can happen to Christmas.

ADVENT MARIAN MASS

Mary plays an obviously important role in the Christmas story. Therefore, during this time of Advent preparations, the church asks that we remember her in a special way since she was specially chosen by God to be the mother of Jesus. To honour Mary we will celebrate an Advent Mass in her honour on December 2nd. I hope you will be able to join me in church that evening.

CHRISTMAS COLLECTION FOR ADOPT A FAMILY AND THE USO

For the second year in a row the parish will accept your donations in the truest Christmas spirit of charitable giving on behalf of the local *Adopt-a-Family* program or if you choose the USO's *Operation Phone Home*. Adopt-a-Family allows us to help an underprivileged, local family enjoy Christmas presents and a Christmas dinner that otherwise they would not be able to afford. Our donations are completely anonymous. The family never knows who their sponsor is. This is an act of Christmas giving whose only reward is the joy we feel in helping someone else. If you are interested in being a part of this program, please speak with Ellen Skroski.

We are all confronted with the reality of our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We pray constantly for our military personnel in these faraway and dangerous places. At Christmas, though, we are asked to do something more. The USO's *Operation Phone Home* distributes pre-paid phone cards to our troops so that they can call home free of charge so that faraway feels a little bit closer for a while. If you would like to express your Christmas spirit in this way, please speak with Fr. Calvo.

CHRISTMAS FLOWER FUND

The poinsettias have become a traditional part of our Christmas celebrations. The Sanctuary of the church looks especially beautiful at Christmas because of the lush reds and greens of the poinsettias. We will accept donations after our Advent Sunday Masses for the Christmas Flower Fund. If you would like to make a memorial donation to this collection, please do so through Fr. Calvo. It is these donations that allow us to festoon our church with flowers at Christmas, and your generosity is appreciated. Thank you.

FEAST OF DIVINE LOVE

I think of the Feast of Divine Love as one of our church's most important liturgical innovations. This feast expands upon its predecessor of the Immaculate Conception. That feast taught of the exceptional birth of Mary, that she was born without the universal stain of original sin so that Jesus would be born free of its influence. A fundamental problem with this theology, however, is that its purpose is to protect Jesus from an attribute of human nature that is otherwise universal. This then implies that Jesus' human nature is not completely like ours, which entails that His act of salvation is in this way deficient.

Bp. Hodur recognized this consequence of the misguided attempt to elevate the spirituality of Mary. Based on our church's belief in the goodness of God's act of creation, and that sin is committed only with knowledge and intent, we have rejected the notion of an inherited original sin, that all humans simply because of our humanity are sinful. This entails that not only is Mary free of original sin, as the Immaculate Conception teaches, but so are all the other children of the human race. This also restores the full act of redemption in the life of Jesus. Rather than an isolated loving creation in Mary, the Feast of Divine Love speaks of all creation as flowing from God's love. Sin is a consequence of choice not of nature, and while nature may not be as perfect as we could imagine in our dreams, the rest of the universe testifies every single moment that life here on our little planet is a miracle beyond the fathomable. This feast day returns the church to an appreciation of this world and our lives that for too long the church had sadly deprecated.

It took a great deal of courage to turn away from 16 hundred years of church teaching to return to

the original revelation of creation as an act of Divine Love. I hope you will respect that commitment and inspiration by joining with me at Mass

ADVENT PENITENTIAL SERVICE

As just mentioned, sin is a choice, but it need not be a permanent one. The sacrament of Penance allows us the opportunity to turn away from sin and towards Christ. If this were a physical healing, we would cross oceans. Since it is a spiritual healing, will you even find the time to spend maybe 40 minutes in church? The church requires all adult members to receive a full sacramental Confession at least once a year. Advent calls upon us to make room in our souls for the coming of Christ. Why not fulfill both of these expectations by participating in this year's Advent Penitential Service?

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS

Our celebration of Jesus' birth begins on Christmas Eve at 11:00pm with the Shepherds' Mass. A professional violinist has been hired to add her gift of music to this very special night's liturgy. This is made possible through a generous donation by Joseph Kisloski in memory of his mother Albina Kisloski. The night's liturgy begins when a child places the baby Jesus in the crèche. We also sing some of the first carols of the season in a candle-lit church. I pray that every one of our parishioners will make church a Christmas priority.

The day after Christmas is St. Stephen's Day, the first martyr of the Christian Church. This is followed on Sunday the 27th by St. John's Day and the Feast of the Humble Shepherds. On St. John's Day, blessed wine is shared with all in attendance, which is supposed to foster health in the new year. On the Feast of the Humble Shepherds, we offer prayers for Sacred Vocations in our church and also accept a special collection for our seminary in Scranton. The Feast of the Holy Innocents is observed on the 28th as we remember all the littlest children of Bethlehem killed by King Herod in his attempt to murder the newborn King of the Jews.

VIDEO PROJECT

Frontier Public Access Television for Conway, Deerfield, Sunderland and Whately is carried on Channel 12 via our local cable provider. Our Sunday Masses are aired with a one week delay each Sunday at 9AM and 9PM. If you cannot be with us in person, I hope you will join us on TV.