

**From the PA's Desk****Christmas Blessings: Merry Christmas!**

On behalf of the parish staff, I want to wish all of you a Merry Christmas. May the memory of the joy of Jesus, born again into a world desperately in need of a savior, fill your hearts with joy and peace. Frequently I was saying, "Merry Christmas" as I was shopping in the stores. What I discovered was this: It brought a smile and a sense of joy on their face. They appreciated the greeting and thanked me for it. Let us never be afraid to proclaim Christ in a world that needs Him more than ever. Merry Christmas one and all!

**Giving Tree:**

Thank you for all those who worked so tirelessly and for many hours toward the success of our Giving Tree Program. First, to all our parishioners who took tags and bought gifts; may you be blessed for your kindness. Thanks also to Jerry Blaxton and the Christian Service Commission for organizing the massive tagging and collection of the gifts, to Joyce Feltman and Joan Whitmore for the countless hours they spent at church. Thanks to those who played "Santa" and delivered the gifts, primary as a way to reach out and be evangelizers in the name of Christ and this faith community. Rather than them coming here to just "pick them up," we wanted to be the hands of Jesus reaching out and touching them in service and compassion. Thanks to Carol Gall, Julie Willoughby, and Judy Moldenhauer.

**Children's Christmas Program:**

Thank you to Mary Moomey, Katie Bellinger, Joshua Lukens, and all the Catechists who did such a wonderful job at the production of our Children's Christmas Program last Sunday. The children sounded wonderful, and all their hard work must have made God very happy as his Son was given praise and glory. One of my favorite quotes is from St. Irenaeus who once said: "The Glory of God is Human Beings Fully Alive," and that was what we witnessed as the children Sung, prayed, and read from Scripture. Thank you too to all the families and parishioners who stayed in church after Mass, to show them how proud we are of them, and to those of you who made homemade soups for our luncheon afterwards.

**CSA:**

We've made our CSA goal from the generosity of a few donors, some who were not even members of the parish, and some people who gave twice. May God bless those who gave of their surplus so generously, and with the money we get to keep over our target goal of \$44,221 – we will continue to develop our programs for outreach to the wider community, and the ongoing development of middle, high school, and young adult ministry in our parish. I feel blessed to be around such kind and generous people!

**Mirrors behind the Manger:**

A few years ago I was at a church that placed a few mirrors behind the Christmas Creech, not because the parishioners there were stuck on themselves, but for a deeper spiritual significance. The pastor wanted them to look at themselves and be reminded that they and we are the ones whom have seen the light of Christ, and we are called like mirrors to reflect that light to all we meet. I once heard the Church referred to as "a community that carries the light of Christ on its face."

The symbolism of faces that reflect the image or light of God has always impressed me. In St. Peter's in Rome, over the great main altar is the large bronze "Baldacchino," built by Bernini in the 1600's. The bronze canopy sits atop four huge pillars, and most visitors fail to notice that there are two images of faces in each of the four columns comprising eight images. The eight faces have a variety of expressions, from joy and excitement, to various stages of confusion, worry, pain, and anguish. The last face in the series of eight is totally different than the previous seven, and its appearance is rounded, hairless, and infantile. Bernini's creative imagery depicts a woman's face in labor during childbirth, and the last face is that of her newborn baby. Could it be that Bernini knew something about human faces reflecting the presence and light of God, and perhaps he was encouraging us to reflect more deeply on a world which needs us to assist him in the birthing process of the incarnation over and over again? After all, the Church is a community that carries the light of Christ on its face.

### **Scripture Today:**

As we celebrate the nativity of the Lord, this might be the time that each of us thinks of things we are grateful for, including the people in our lives, who have made this past year what it has been. Since the Mass is a prayer of Thanksgiving, this week's participation at the Birth of the Lord Jesus, is automatically a prayer of thanks; thanks for all the things held in your heart this Christmas-time.

It might be that you give thanks for Christmases "past." For loved ones, friends and family who, over the years, have formed you into the person you are. Maybe you recall a "certain" Christmas in your youth and remember the feeling of sheer bliss as you unwrapped a certain gift that "Santa" left; a bicycle with a banana seat; a doll house made of metal and plastic furniture; an Easy Bake Oven; Matchbox cars or a Lionel Train set? Treasures that looking back now, might have been made possible because of the love of parents or grandparents, even if it meant they "went without." Perhaps its time to give thanks, either in person to that parent or grandparent, or in thought and prayer as you celebrate Christmas 2016.

I read once that Christmas is a time of "happy sadness," as we look back on our lives and realize what others have done for us, and that it may be too late to thank them in person. If this may resonate in your life, maybe now it's the time to examine your past and consider those whom you need to thank... a special teacher who may still be living; an old neighbor you may have lost track of; a fellow employee that was always helpful and fun to be around that you have not seen since their retirement or change of jobs? Seek out those you need to show your appreciation to, or you just might want to contact them and see how they are! These are the "happy" moments we might experience this week as we reach out to others. However, there may be some who have passed from this life to the next; recollections of things we have done toward others that we may be sorry for and it's too late to apologize, but we still can offer them up in thanksgiving.

The "sadness" of the season comes into play when we recall simpler times; times of childhood, times of easy living, times with those who are now with the Lord and we long to be with again. Nevertheless, we are people of faith—faith in the Lord that one day we shall be with those people again, but until then we continue our journey toward the Kingdom doing the best we can at being Christ to each other. Don't let this Holy Season slip by without giving thanks, especially thanks to God for all that God has done for you, including the promise of eternal life.

Christmas is an important Holy Day in our life, but it is secondary to another... all of us are born, including the Christ-child, but only Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose from the death so that all may live! As we look forward to the greatest Holy Days of our lives, the Sacred Triduum that leads us to our Easter celebration, let us pray for God's joy and peace for ourselves, our loved ones, but maybe most especially for our enemies, that God grace all with the presence of His love in this most joyous time of the year!