

Forming Good Stewards

Good stewards are formed by other good stewards!

Please make sure this is distributed to the **pastor**, to the other **priest** and **deacons** in the parish, and to the **person who produces the bulletin**.

Bulletin Bites

December 3, 2017

The First Sunday of Advent

Mark 13:33-37

Option 1

“Be watchful! Be alert!”

Practically every child in the United States can complete the jingle that begins with “You better watch out, you better not pout. . . .” Somebody is coming to town and he is going to have that dreaded “list.” Signs of his coming are everywhere. There is great anticipation of the night when he will bring to people around the world the toys, clothing and other material things they most desire. His very popularity surrounds an event that was one of the most important things to happen for the salvation of mankind - the birth of a Jewish child, Jesus, son of Mary and her husband, Joseph, a carpenter from the small hamlet of Nazareth in Galilee. Over the next four weeks we have an opportunity to read and reflect and pray for a greater insight into the true meaning of the Nativity of the child, Jesus. Push aside the hype and the hoopla and prepare a true gift for Jesus - a heart that is more like His and a life that imitates Him in how we treat others. Be watchful and be alert to every opportunity to be like Jesus.

Option 2

“What I say to you, I say to all: ‘Watch!’”

“Watch out! Don’t cry or pout. He’s making a list and checking it twice. He’s gonna find out who’s naughty or nice. He sees you sleeping and knows when you’re awake. He knows who is bad or good, so be good for goodness sake.” Have you figured out who HE is? There is going to be celebration of His birth, including singing and eating and drinking. People will visit family and friends and exchange expensive gifts, some of dubious value and usefulness. Do you know who HE is? It is Jesus, of course! This First Sunday of Advent is the beginning of a brief time for us to reflect on the incredible miracle and mystery of God Incarnate, God become man. It is a time for us to contemplate why the God who created us become one of us? His unconditional, unlimited love for us is certainly one reason. The celebrations, the food, the gifts, are nice. But spending time to comprehend the magnitude of God’s love for us is the real purpose of Advent. That is a gift we can give to the God who created us and became one of us.

December 10, 2017
Second Sunday of Advent
A voice of one crying out in the desert:
Mark 1:1-8

Option 1
“One mightier than I is coming after me.” Mark 1:1-8

Christmas is the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God. It is a very special moment for all Christians. It is a time of giving. Have you finished your Christmas shopping yet? Have you even finished making your Christmas list? What gift have you prepared for Jesus? Is Jesus even on your Christmas list? Should he not be at the top of our list? In the first lines of Mark's Gospel we see that Jesus is at the top of John's list. He has prepared the way for Jesus. He recognized that "One mightier than I is coming after me." John's gift was his humble recognition of Jesus as the one who "will baptize you with water and the Holy Spirit." If we have no other gift for Jesus, we can humbly acknowledge God as the source of all that we are and have and spend time pondering how we use all that God has given us to the best of our ability in the year to come. Jesus would love such a gift.

Option 2
“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.”

The comment we often hear when someone is acting silly or goofy is "Oh, that is just George [or whatever the person's name] being George." We can wonder what Elizabeth or Zachariah said when people told them that their son John was living in the desert, wearing a camelhair shirt and leather belt [expensive belts were braided or made of fine linen] and eating locust and wild honey. Did they say, "Oh, that's just John being John." If so, they were right. John was being *who* and *what* God created him to be - a messenger sent by God to prepare the way of the Lord by making straight his path and calling people to repent for their sins. John had accepted his role and mission in life. He knew he was not the Messiah but that he was to prepare the way for the Messiah. He may have dressed a little strange and eaten an unusual diet, but he did what God created him to do. Are we doing what God created us to do? Are we preparing the way for the Lord, at least the way for the Lord to come into our heart?

December 17, 2017
Third Sunday of Advent
Gospel Jn 1:6-8, 19-28

Option 1
“I am the voice of one crying out in the desert,
make straight the way of the Lord”

Today we hear the story of the Baptism of Jesus from the beginning of St. John's Gospel. John adds the information that "This happened in Bethany across from the Jordan where John was baptizing." This situates the event on the east side of the Jordan River, not far from Herod's castle/fortress at Machaerus, where John would soon be beheaded. John the Baptist did not urge people to challenge the authority of leaders of the Jews or call for the overthrow of the civil

government, or an armed revolt. He called upon people to change their own hearts and to live according to God's Commandment to love God and our neighbor as our self. This is how we "make straight the way of the Lord" to enter our hearts. For many this involves radical change. It involves a humble admission that what we are is God's gift to us; what we become is our gift to God. Are you still struggling with a gift for Jesus. Here it is: "Make straight the way of the Lord" to enter your heart by a humble admission of who God is in our lives.

Option 2

"The one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie."

Many children have a visit from "Santa" at a family gathering just before Christmas. Typically, Santa sounds like and resembles one of the male elders of the family [who tries unsuccessfully to change his voice]. Small children are either excited or frightened. As they grow older they get suspicious and start to ask questions, "Why is Pappa never here when Santa comes?" and "Why is Santa wearing Pappa's glasses and watch?" It is a rite of passage when they finally "get it" and become responsible for keeping a treasured family secret. For the Jews in Jerusalem who sent priest and Levites to ask John *who* and *what* he was, the implications were much more serious than the identity of Santa. If John was the Messiah, or was proclaiming the imminent arrival of the Messiah, the influence and livelihoods of the priest and Levites could be at risk. They were concerned that God *had* become incarnate. Do we understand the implications of God incarnate? That is what we are preparing to celebrate on Christmas. Are we ready for that?

**December 24, 2017
Fourth Sunday of Advent
Luke 1:26-38**

Option 1

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.

May it be done to me according to your word. "

If you add up all of the words spoken by Mary to the Angel at the Annunciation [30]; to Elizabeth at their meeting [122 in the Magnificat]; When she and Joseph find Jesus in the Temple[20]; and her comments to Jesus and instructions to the servants at the wedding feast at Cana [9], she speaks a total of 181 words in all of Scripture. Mary was a woman of few words, at least according to the Gospels. From expressing her lack of understanding about How God would accomplish what the angel announced to her, to her simple, "May it be done unto me according to your word" and her awareness that "My *soul* proclaims the greatness of the Lord" to her final instructions to the servants at Cana, "Do whatever he tells you." Mary is both our Mother and our Model. As Christmas gets nearer we should all be growing stronger in our willingness to accept the challenges God has in store for us with a simple "May it be done unto me according to your word" so our *soul* will "proclaim the greatness of our Lord" and we will be ready, without hesitation to "Do whatever he tells you." Now, let us celebrate Christmas.

Option 2

Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.

May it be done to me according to your word.”

On the Second Sunday of Advent we noted that “John [The Baptist] was just being John.” He discerned God’s will for him and he did it. Now we hear of “Mary just being Mary,” a young teenager in a tiny hamlet on a craggy hilltop in the northern region of Galilee. Mary heard a message from God so amazing she wondered how it could happen. But she realized it was God’s will for her and she consented. There were many details and consequences she could not know, but she said “Yes!” to be the human mother of God incarnate. That was “Mary just being Mary.” That is all God asked of her and that is all God ask of us - to be all that God creates us to be. For us, just as for John and Mary, we begin by identifying, accepting and developing all of the unique talents, abilities and gifts God has given to each of us, and then using them to the best of our ability *for ourselves and for others*. Is that not the greatest gift we can give to Jesus when we celebrate his birth on Christmas? Is our present for Jesus ready?

December 25, 2017

Solemnity of Christmas

The Word Became Flesh and Made His Dwelling Among Us!

Gospel John 1:1-18

Option 1

In the rush and clamor that has come to characterize the commercialization of Christmas the true meaning of what we are celebrating can easily get lost. From a week before Thanksgiving until sometime after the New Year there seems to be an excess of activity, confusion, decorating, spending [often of money we cannot afford], eating, drinking, and competitiveness. On the positive side many families gather to renew great traditions and indulge in feast of treasured family recipes; friends reunite; and we make new acquaintances. By the time the decorations are dismantled and stored away the whole process can seem like an endurance test that leaves us exhausted and bewildered, rather than rejuvenated and rejoicing, about the true meaning of Christmas for all of us who are baptized in the name of our Triune God, the awesome truth that:

THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND MADE HIS DWELLING AMONG US!

HAVE A CHRIST FILLED CHRISTMAS!