

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(s) who produces the bulletin***.

Bulletin Bites

January 1, 2017

The Octave Day of Christmas

Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God

Option 1

“And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.”

Mary grew up in the small of village of Nazareth on top of a craggy hill near the Sea of Galilee. There were about four hundred people, many related by birth or marriage. Few, if any, could read or write, and there were no modern means of communication. People actually had to speak to each other, face to face. Women went to the nearest well or stream to get the day’s supply of water and wash clothes. Men worked together in shops or in the fields. Families and neighbors gathered around campfires to cook. That is when they shared the latest news or gossip. When Mary said “Yes” to be the Mother of God Incarnate she knew she knew she would be the topic of discussion. She knew people would not understand and she could be stoned to death. She did it anyway. Her “Yes” brought her much grief. She did it anyway. That is why we honor Mary as the Mother of God. That is why we should spend this day learning from Mary and making every effort to be more like her - to say “Yes” to God. And when things are difficult, to do it anyway.

Option 2

**“Then the shepherds returned,
glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen,
just as it had been told to them.”**

The Angel Gabriel appeared to a teenaged girl named Mary and told her she would conceive a child, and that “He will be called Son of the Most High.” She was a virgin, but she knew the Angel was telling her she would be the mother of the Messiah. The angel then appeared to Joseph and assured him, “It is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her.” When Jesus was born in a cave in the hills of Bethlehem an angel appeared to shepherds nearby and said, “A savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord.” It would seem that God would reveal such important news to the learned and the powerful. Well, God did reveal it to them through the prophets. They rejected and ignored the prophets. When Jesus proclaimed the Good News of the Kingdom of God, the learned and powerful plotted to eliminate him. Mary watched as they tortured and killed the Man she had raised, the Son of God. That is why we honor Mary as the Mother of God and why we should try to learn from her and imitate her.

January 8, 2017
The Epiphany of the Lord
Matthew 2:1-12

Option 1

“They prostrated themselves and did him homage.”

Miriam/Webster defines *Epiphany* as “*a Christian festival held on January 6 in honor of the coming of the three kings to the infant Jesus Christ*” and “*A moment in which you suddenly see or understand something in a new or very clear way.*” For Christians it is both. The three astrologers made a difficult journey from a foreign land to Bethlehem to visit a child because they saw a sign of his birth that helped them to “*suddenly see or understand something in a new or very clear way.*” It is unlikely the “Magi” understood the full implications of the birth of Jesus, but they obviously believed he represented hope for a chaotic and cruel world. Is it not ironic that modern day Christmas has become more of an orgy of parties and a frenzy of buying and giving presents than a time to reflect on and appreciate that ***Jesus is the Reason for the Season.*** Do we make time to ***prostrate ourselves and do him homage*** and to ***see or understand Him in a new or very clear way.*** If not, there is still time to make the time.

Option 2

“Where is the newborn king of the Jews?

We saw his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage.”

The *Feast of the Epiphany* originated in the Eastern Church and eventually celebrated in the Roman Rite as the *Manifestation of the Lord* to astrologers from Persia (present day Iran). The magi made the long and difficult journey to Bethlehem to pay homage to a newborn Jewish child. For us it is another opportunity to reflect on the true meaning of the Birth of Christ - God Incarnate - and how he is manifested in our lives. It is an opportunity to ponder: Did we grow in our understanding and appreciation of *Emmanuel* [God is with us]. Have we made an effort equivalent to the Magi to present a gift to the Child Jesus - a gift of our time and a commitment to contribute more of our talents and resources to the mission of the Church and greater involvement in our parish faith community? No? Happily, it is not too late. Those gifts abound in our lives. Are we willing to share them with others and manifest Jesus to others?

January 15, 2017
Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
John 1:29-34

Option 1

“I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and remain on him.”

A dove is a popular image in Christianity to depict the Holy Spirit. But note that John did not say, “I saw a dove . . .” He said “I saw the Spirit . . .” A “spirit” is not visible to the human eye. It is discernable in the human heart and mind. John was aware that the Spirit of God was in Jesus. That Spirit did not come on Jesus and then depart. It remained. John called people to “repent” and baptized them with water as a sign they had been washed clean and could reform their lives. He knew that Jesus would baptize them, and us, with the Spirit that is in Him - the Spirit that would call and empower us to go beyond repentance and reform to seek the greatest

good [the “magis” in Latin] that God desires and intends for us to achieve for ourselves and for others. The “magis” does not necessarily mean easy and pleasant. For Jesus, in whom the “Spirit remained” it involved torture and crucifixion. For us it will at least involve challenges and difficult choices. But if we allow the Spirit to be in us, we will achieve our “magis.”

Option 2

“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Note that John says “*sin* of the world” and not “*sins* of the world.” We all have free will and are capable of committing individual sins for which we must account and seek forgiveness. But what is the *sin* of the world? John observed the self-centeredness in the people of his day that is the opposite of being centered on God. John understood that such self-centeredness is at the heart of all sin in the world and recognized Jesus as the Lamb of God, the person who would sacrifice himself to help us root out self-centeredness and become centered on God. Jesus did that with his life and his teaching. But he needs our help. Because God has given us the great gift of free will we must choose to stop being centered on ourselves and choose to put God at the center of our lives. When we are centered on God we become a *person for others*. If everyone in the world becomes a *person for others* would there be any *sin of the world*?

January 22, 2017

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Matthew 4:12-23

Option 1

“At once they left their nets and followed him.”

The *Deadliest Catch* is a popular “reality” program. It features the men who fish for crabs in the Bering Sea. The rough seas, cold weather and heavy equipment can be dangerous, and sometimes deadly. Fishing on the Sea of Galilee in the time of Jesus may not have been as deadly but it was difficult and demanding. It may be understandable that when Jesus called Simon (called Peter), Andrew, James and John to leave their nets and become “fishers of men,” they jumped at the chance. But they actually did not give up one to accept the other. They continued their livelihood of fishing the sea as they followed Jesus and learned from his words and example how to lead others to a greater awareness of the love of a great and generous God - to be “fishers of men.” Through his call to Peter and the others Jesus calls us to learn from him to use all of the talents, abilities and gifts God has given us to be “fishers of men” - to lead others to Him. In many ways that is more challenging than fishing for crabs in the Bering Sea.

Option 2

“Come after me and I will make you fishers of men.”

Brothers, Simon and Andrew, presumably like their father and many generations before them, were fisherman on the deep and sometimes treacherous Sea of Galilee. They tended their nets, repaired their boats, went out on the waters day and night in hope of finding fish to fill their nets. If they were fortunate to make a catch they had to manually haul in their nets, row to shore, dock their boats, sort their catch, bring them to market, and do it all over again as soon as possible. It was a tough life and they were rugged people. Jesus calls them to become “fishers of men.” Mark tells us they abandoned their nets and followed Jesus. They probably continued fishing to

earn a livelihood, but they did follow Jesus to learn from his teaching and carry on his mission. They eventually learn that fishing for men is at least as difficult and dangerous as fishing for fish, if not more so. Through Simon, called Peter, Andrew, James and John, Jesus is calling us to fishers of others by imitating him and being a person for others. Are we willing to follow Jesus?

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 5:1-12a

Option 1

“When Jesus saw the crowds He began to teach them, saying ‘Blessed are the . . .’”
Imagine that you are in the crowd on the side of the mountain on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee listening to Jesus. You are there because you heard that he was saying great things about the Kingdom of God and teaching about how to gain eternal life. You are hoping to hear how he plans to free the Jews from the oppression of the Roman conquerors and the harshness of the Jewish leaders. Imagine your surprise when Jesus starts talking about “the poor in spirit; those who mourn; the meek; those who hunger and thirst righteousness; the merciful; the clean of heart; peacemakers; those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness; and who are persecuted and have every kind of evil uttered against you falsely because of me.” Would you have said, “Yeah, that’s what I want to hear. Let’s all go follow that guy”? Or would you, like some around you, drift away unwilling to do what Jesus was teaching? For two thousand years the followers of Jesus have been faced with the same choice. Now we are faced with that choice.

Option 2
“Blessed are . . . ”

The crowd gathered on a hillside on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee were probably surprised by the kinds of people Jesus describes after saying “Blessed are the. . .” But Jesus is describing characteristics that God intended for all of us to have. **Imagine a world in which everyone** was poor in spirit, rather than selfishly materialistic; mourned the pain and loss of others, rather than cause it; meek, rather than proud and boastful; hungered for what is right, rather than ignored or trampled on the rights of others; merciful, rather than vengeful; pure of heart, rather than seeking their own pleasure at the cost of others; made peace rather than cause conflict; accepted rejection for doing what is right, rather than retaliate against those who do wrong; endured insults and persecution for imitating Jesus, without bitterness. If we all accepted the responsibility to be the person God created us to be, that would be paradise. Hmmmmmm!