

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

December 1, 2019

First Sunday of Advent

Matthew 24:37-44

Option 1

“So too, you also must be prepared, for at the hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.”

Women do not carry large purses with at least one every item they or their children may possibly need because they like carrying heavy objects or exercising their biceps. They learn from experience that it is better to have something and not need it, than to need something and not have it. Large planes and space ships have redundant mechanical and electrical systems in the event one fails. This reflects the Boy Scouts’ motto: “Be prepared!” Jesus understood that. He taught his followers, and us, to “Be prepared!” But for what? The simple answers are, “Just about anything” or “Whatever life brings us.” Jesus did not know what specifically each of us would face, but he knew that if we loved God with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength, and loved our neighbor as ourselves we would be ready to use all of the talents, abilities and gifts God has given us, to the best of our ability, for our own benefit and the benefit of others. That is being prepared. Advent is a great time to get better prepared.

Option 2

“Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.”

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace we might do well to contemplate that moment when we actually meet Jesus face to face. Imagine that you are told that Jesus will come to meet you. You are taken to a vast open field and told that Jesus will approach from a certain direction. You train your eyes on the horizon and wait. Then, in the far distance, you see a figure moving toward you. As the figure gets closer you begin to make out some features, such as height, gait, clothing, and more. As the person steadily walks closer to you can make out hair color and facial features. Suddenly, you realize that you know this person. It is someone you encountered who was in need of your assistance. There are two possibilities. You did help this person or you did not. Knowing it is Jesus who approaches, what do you hope you did? So we must always be prepared, for at an hour we do not expect, the Son of Man will come to us.

December 8, 2019
Second Sunday of Advent
Matthew 3:1-12

Option 1

**“A voice of one crying out in the desert,
‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.’”**

Matthew quotes the passage above from the prophet Isaiah to describe John the Baptist. He was aware that the land to the east of the River Jordan where John lived a simple life; preached a powerful message; and hid from Jewish leaders and Roman conquerors, was quite barren and harsh. It was an area of inert minerals long before it was exposed by earthquakes and eroded by the waters that became the Jordan River as it empties into the Dead Sea. John sacrificed much, risked all and was eventually martyred for being *“A voice of one crying out in the desert . . .”* He called people to acknowledge their sins, repent and be baptized with water. Despite all that he knew, he had the humility to proclaim, “the one who is coming after me is mightier than I.” John came before Jesus but he was one of the greatest imitators of Jesus. We have the example of John, Mary, the Apostles, and two thousand years of people who are models of faithful imitators of Jesus. Are we learning from them? Advent is a time to grow in our efforts to be like Jesus.

Option 2

**“He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
His winnowing fan is in his hand.”**

To properly prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus in a cave in the hills of Bethlehem more than two thousand years ago it is helpful to recall our Baptism. We received the Holy Spirit and were presented with a candle that represented the Light of Christ that we were charged to “keep burning brightly!” With our Baptism came the responsibility to know Christ so we can imitate Christ and be Christ to all we encounter. In a season when so many gifts are being bought, wrapped and given, we should recall that the greatest gift we can give to others at Christmas, or any other time of the year, is not the latest electronic device or the newest fashion in clothes. The greatest gift we can give is ourselves: all that we are, all that God has given to us, and all that we will ever become. Glitzy games will soon be outdated and fancy jeans go out of style, but the gift of self will last forever for both the person who receives the gift and the giver of the gift.

December 15, 2019
Third Sunday of Advent
Matthew 11:2-11

Option 1

“What did you go out into the desert to see?”

After his arrest John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” John knew his time to lead them was coming to an end. Jesus simply tells them to report what they saw and heard. Jesus then proclaims the greatness of John, but assures those who acknowledge their sin and repent, who understand and have the faith to imitate what He said and did, will enter the Kingdom of God and be greater than John during his sojourn on earth. It is up to each of us who do our best to learn about Jesus, to be like Jesus, to

love like Jesus, and to risk all like Jesus by loving God and our neighbor as ourselves. That is certainly something to desire. It is something to prepare for. It is something to strive for. We can do that by reading the nativity stories in Matthew and Luke before we hear them proclaimed during the Christmas Masses. Reflect on the meaning of God made Man, born in a cave, who is the Prince of Peace. Reflect on how we can be more like Jesus.

Option 2

“What did you go out into the desert to see? To see a prophet?

Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

John the Baptist challenged people to identify and acknowledge the error and evil in their lives. He baptized them with water as a sign of their decision to repent - to turn away from sin and live a new way. While in prison he sent his followers to Jesus to ask if he was the one they were expecting. Jesus sent back a simple message, “Go tell him what you see.” Jesus then says that no man born of woman is greater than John, but not because of how he dressed or where he lived. No, John was great because he knew the truth, he lived the truth, and he challenged others, and us, to live the truth. John was a prophet, and more. The role of a prophet is to identify the silly, stupid, senseless, and sinful things in our world and to call for change. In doing that John prepared the way for Jesus. At our Baptism we are anointed “priest, *prophet* and king.” Like John, we must prepare the way for Jesus, for ourselves and for others.

December 22

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Matthew 1:18-24

Option 1

**“Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man,
yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly.”**

St. Joseph is rightly revered for his contribution to our eternal salvation. He must have been devastated by the news that Mary, his betrothed wife, was pregnant, but not with his child. He knew Mary would not only be shamed, but in a small village like Nazareth, everyone would have known that Joseph was not the father and she was at risk of being stoned to death. Joseph trusted God and believed his assurance, through an angel, that Mary had not been unfaithful. He took her into his home and was a loving and caring husband of Mary and father to Jesus. Like Joseph, we face difficult situations and challenges in life that hurt us physically, emotionally and spiritually. How we deal with them depends largely on how well we know Jesus by constant reading and reflection of the truth revealed to us by God in Scripture. Have you prepared your gift for Jesus to celebrate his birthday? If not, give Him the gift of reading one of the four Gospels, such as Matthew or Luke. And remember, **Jesus is the Reason for the Season.**

Option 2

**“When Joseph awoke he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him
and he took his wife (Mary) into his home.”**

What if Joseph, in the legitimate exercise of his free will, had said “No, I will not take Mary into my home as my wife. Let her be stoned to death according to the law.” Mary, despite the deadly consequences that could await her, had already freely said “Yes” and the Word was Incarnate in her womb. Happily for us all, Joseph received Mary into his home and lovingly

cared for her and for the child that he knew was not his own. They are a family made holy by mutual love and courage and sacrifice (the Latin derivatives of the word “sacrifice” mean “making holy what we do”). They gave themselves to one another, and to us, in total love, without knowing the ultimate cost or being deterred by the consequences. Imagine a world in which every family is characterized by such love, courage and sacrifice; by “making holy what we do” regardless of the cost or consequences - every family a holy family. Oh what a Christmas that would be!

December 29, 2019
Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph
Matthew 2:13-15,19-23

Option 1

“Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt.”

Once again Matthew tells us that Joseph, in response to his belief in God’s will for him, acts to protect Mary and her son, Jesus. He hurriedly leaves Israel during the night to go to Egypt to protect Jesus from Herod. It was not safe to travel at night. The journey to Egypt took them through the Sinai desert and was dangerous and difficult. In Egypt they were strangers in a strange land. They had no family or friends to support them. Joseph’s care of Mary and Jesus, and their trust in Joseph, provide us with a magnificent example of how family is holy and a reflection of the love and unity of the Trinity. The holiness of a family is not indicated by how much each member of the family has, but by the fact each member of the family has each other, to love, to care for, to support, particularly in times of trial and tribulations. All who call themselves Catholic are called to be a holy family in the image of Joseph, Mary and Jesus.

Option 2

“Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.”

History has been harsh on Herod the Great, and rightly so. He accomplished much but at a tragic cost to others including his wife, Miriam, and several of his sons, whom he had killed. He sent his soldiers to seek out the child Jesus and kill him. Before we join in the condemnation of Herod we should search our soul to determine how well we have fulfilled our responsibility to search for the child Jesus so we could imitate him. Have we, in our own way, destroyed the real reason Jesus came into the world? Paul offers us a way to keep Jesus alive in our hearts and in the world in which we live: “Put on, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another . . . as the Lord has forgiven you so must you also do. . . And let the peace of Christ control your hearts . . . And the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” *Col 3:12-21*. Imagine a world in which everyone, including Herod and other powerful leaders, *sought out and imitated* Jesus.