



Light of Love!



*Awaiting Christ,
the gift of love*

On this Fourth Sunday of Advent, celebrate love. The love of the Holy Trinity, our Blessed Mother, and the love we give to others when we think and act in confident faith.

Today we hear Prophet Micha declare that from Bethlehem shall come a ruler – the Messiah.

St. Paul in our Second Reading tells us that Christ came for all of us. His sacrifice was out of complete love. It was so complete that no other sacrifice is needed for He took away our sins and makes us holy.

Today's Gospel we hear Luke's story of the Visitation – when Mary travelled to Elizabeth.

Let us all imagine the sheer joy the two shared when they first embraced.

When we receive good news, we can't wait to share it. We beam with pride and are so determined to tell our closest family and friends about our joy and enthusiasm that nothing can get in our way. Imagine the excitement, energy, and determination that overcame Mary after the Angel Gabriel visited her to share God's perfect plan for her to be the mother of God, and also disclose the miracle that would be John the Baptist.

Luke tells us Mary traveled in haste to get to her cousin Elizabeth. We know today the feat of that journey – one that was nearly 100 miles of hilly terrain from Nazareth to Judea.

When Mary arrives, Elizabeth shouts with joyful excitement, "Most blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

Just after this Gospel, read on - Luke 1:46-55 – and meditate on the Canticle of Mary (the Magnificat). Prepare your hearts to receive Christ at Christmas – the Savior of the World.

“And Mary said, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”



READY TO LEAD OTHERS TO CHRIST?

YOU WERE BORN READY

As we enter the Christmas Season reflect on your gift of faith. Call to mind those who have influenced your faith by their words or actions. Then stop and ask yourself who have you inspired? Who will you give the gift of faith by your prayer, words, and actions. Don't be shy. You were born ready. You were made by God to do good works.

Bishop Mark Brennan has asked all of us to take seriously the challenge to lead others to Christ and the Church. Today we share a summary of each of the five sections of his Advent Pastoral Letter given to the faithful of WV at the beginning of Advent. Bishop Mark said this letter is his most important one as our shepherd.



OUR IDENTITY AND MISSION

How do you handle challenges? Do you run away from them or try to meet them? Here's the challenge the Lord Jesus gives us: he commands us to make him known to other people and to invite them to put their faith in him. He said to his disciples before he ascended back to heaven: Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age [Matthew 28:19-20].

This effort to bring other people to Christ and him to them is formally known as "evangelization." --- it is really about sharing our faith in Christ with others to give them an opportunity to know him and believe in him.



ALL OF US ARE CALLED TO EVANGELIZE

Lord also calls you to join in the Church's great evangelizing mission. The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few, he said, so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest

[Matthew 9:37]. You are one of those laborers for the Gospel. Your Baptism made you a missionary disciple. The grace of that sacrament, renewed by the Eucharist, intensified by Confirmation, restored by Penance, strengthens you to love God above all things and your neighbor as yourself. there is no greater form of love than to introduce another human being to his or her Savior. That love can make the difference between a person achieving the final destiny of eternal life in heaven or missing out on it.

The Lord is not content with us caring only for our own salvation; he wants us to be concerned about others' salvation, too. Second, we have truly good news to share with other people.

Out of love, we should be willing to reach out to those who have never known Christ or known him only superficially, as well as to those Catholics who, for various reasons, have stopped practicing their faith.

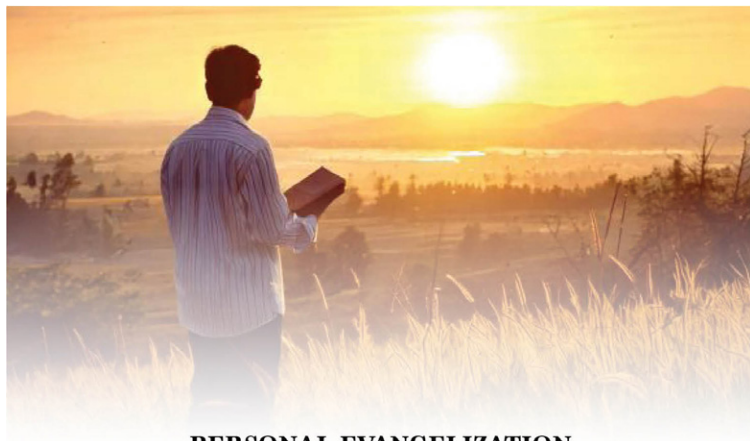


WITNESS OF LIFE AND EXPLICIT PROCLAMATION

If we are to evangelize effectively, it is essential that our way of life be in harmony with what we say to others about Christ and the Church.

As St. Paul VI said, "The Church is evangelized by constant conversion and renewal in order to evangelize the world with credibility" [EN 15].

Bring others to Christ by living your faith.



PERSONAL EVANGELIZATION

How do you engage personally in evangelization? Begin by praying daily for specific people to be open to the gift of faith or of a renewed faith.

Pray for them by name.

Then add weight to your prayer by fasting for them at least once a week.

Offer to God your good works and sufferings on behalf of those for whom you are praying. God loves all absent Catholics and religiously unaffiliated people more than we do but He wants to see how much we love them. Following these steps shows Him our love.



NOW IS THE ACCEPTABLE TIME, NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION (II CORINTHIANS 6:2)

We have been engaged for the past three years in a Eucharistic Revival and are now in the Year of Mission. As part of the Revival, the “Walk with One” effort is an approach to personal evangelization, similar to the one I have been describing.

Be willing to step out in faith, trusting in the Lord’s words: *Do not worry beforehand about what you are to say but say whatever will be given to you at that hour, for it will not be you who are speaking but the Holy Spirit* [Mark 13:11]. Speak simply and personally. You can do it. A young man in an airplane revealed to the Catholic

passenger seated next to him that he was having trouble dealing with his girlfriend’s decision to end their relationship. The Catholic knew a priest where the young man lived. “Why don’t you go talk with him? He gave me good advice once.” The man did contact the priest and found his counsel helpful. It led him to explore Catholicism and eventually he decided to come into the Church.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, many of you have spoken to me about your sadness that family members and friends have walked away from the Church. Some of you lament that your parishes are aging with few young families and single persons in sight. I don’t think any of us wants our Church to shrink and disappear. Our Catholic Church is the original Christian Church and by far the most universal. Don’t we want it to embrace as many of those hundreds of thousands of West Virginians, who are *troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd* [Matthew 9:36], and assure them that they have a true Shepherd in Jesus Christ? Our Church – meaning all of us working together – must fulfill our mission and not settle for just hanging on, sad and listless.

If your faith matters to you, do your part. Join with other Catholics around the state to reach out to those we have lost and those we never had. It is for their good and for ours as well. It may take years to see the full fruit of our efforts but we must begin. This is the challenge the Lord gives us here and now.

The season of Advent is a season of hope.

Pope Francis has announced that the central theme of the Jubilee Year in 2025 will be hope.

Jesus wants us to share our hope for forgiveness and eternal life with others. If you are willing to do so, you may confidently hope to hear these words from the Lord when you die: *Well done, my good and faithful servant . . . Come, share your master’s joy* [Matthew 25:23].

Be the good, faithful servant Jesus calls you to be and you will be rewarded beyond measure by the Lord with a joy that will never end.

If your *faith* matters to you,
do your part.
Bishop Mark E. Brennan



Year of Hope Begins Place Your Trust in God

Pope Francis will officially open the Year of Hope with the Church's ancient rite of the Opening of the Holy Door of the Papal Basilica of St. Peter on December 24. This ritual symbolizes a journey toward spiritual salvation and redemption, welcoming pilgrims from around the world to break the seal and enter as invited guests into Christ's Church to see His mercy and embrace the hope, forgiveness, and grace we obtain when we receive Christ.

His announcement of the theme for this jubilee year was titled, "Spes Non Confudit," translating to "Hope does not disappoint."

"Everyone knows what it is to hope," said Pope Francis. "In the heart of each person, hope dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite our not knowing what the future may bring. Even so, uncertainty about the future may at times give rise to conflicting feelings, ranging from confident trust to apprehensiveness, from serenity to anxiety, from firm conviction to hesitation and doubt. Often, we come across people who are discouraged, pessimistic and cynical about the future, as if nothing could possibly bring them happiness.

"For all of us, may the Jubilee be an opportunity to be renewed in hope. God's word helps us find reasons for that hope. Taking it as our guide, let us return to the message that the Apostle Paul wished to communicate to the Christians of Rome," the Holy Father said.

Pope Francis wants us to dedicate 2025 to be "pilgrims of hope of Christ" looking to St. Paul as a guide.

Find strength in reading St. Paul's letters to the Romans,

Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Thessalonians, and to Philemon. Spend this year hopeful through his preaching and teaching on Christian living, grace, and salvation that is the true gift from God through our faith in Jesus Christ and His Church.

Just as Bishop Mark Brennan and the US Bishops have asked us to continue our mission to bring others to Jesus and to heaven with us, know that we should not hesitate to do these good works and deeds for God.

It was St. Paul who said we were made for it, "the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

Year of Hope prayer cards will be distributed in our parishes throughout the Christmas season.

Let this Year of Hope and our mission to lead others to Jesus bring many blessing upon the faithful of WV. Place your trust in God who created you to do good works.





MARY'S

REFUGE

Hope Is Here. Hope Grows Here.

Put yourself in the story of Mary. We know well the Divine story, but for a moment concentrate on the human heart with love, empathy, and respect.

She was so young.

Her pregnancy announced before her engagement, let alone marriage to Joseph.

Our minds can wonder all over – the feelings are overwhelming. Once past the initial shocks personally and among the reaction of family, friends, and the people of around town, routine life settles in. We can't fully imagine her daily trials, but because of her great love of God we know she is strong and confident.

Then she gets to her ninth month.

However, she is not in the comfort of family or friends in her small community. They are from home, in the big city, and at night, when she knew there is no time to waste. She tells Joseph, "It's time!"

But there was nowhere to go. The Blessed One is turned away, not once but time and time again. No one takes her in. Left in the bitter cold – certainly frightened, heart pounding, in pain, in disbelief of being shunned, and completely vulnerable now.

Finally, at least one kind soul leads them to a lowly stable, where – as we know – the miracle above all miracles happens – the birth of Jesus.

We hope and pray that we would be that kind soul to give Mary refuge.

When we think and act like Christ we are.

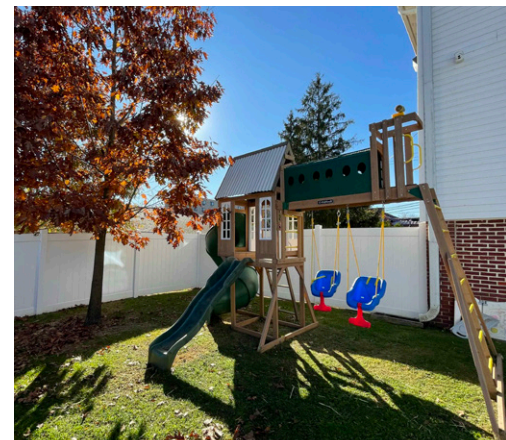
Allison Ferrell, her staff, and many named and unnamed supporters are those kind souls to young expectant mothers. Ferrell is the director of Mary's Refuge, a pro-life maternity home in Martinsburg, WV.

Meeting her and letting her talk about the home is a chance to see the love of Christ and the respect of Mary come to life. It is obvious in her eyes and compassionate spirit she is a loving momma mentor.

"We are a family here – the young ladies, their babies, the staff, Fr. Tom (Gallagher), Deacon Pat (Michel), Deacon Dave (Galvin), our volunteers..." Ferrell said. "We are showing these ladies and the community there is hope."

As we are in this season of waiting approaching Christmas, and we begin the Church and Pope Francis' Year of Hope on Christmas Eve; Mary's Refuge stands as a great example – a model of what the season and our faith is about. Further it is a virtuous ministry for pro-life, pro-women, pro-child.

...continued



“Our theme is Hope Is Here,” Ferrell said. “And hope grows here in every sense of the word.”

Mary’s Refuge, named in honor of the Blessed Mother, is that safe haven home, where mothers-to-be find more than a stable roof over their heads, but also prenatal care, parenting classes, and educational resources. These mothers receive physical, emotional and spiritual support.

Ferrell said the mothers living at Mary’s Refuge are from a wide range of backgrounds and are in different spots on life’s journey, but each now a part of a community working to take positive steps towards a better, brighter future.

Currently Mary’s Refuge, that was once a convent, serves nine mothers and mothers-to-be – and of course their little ones.

“We make sure these ladies feel this is home – it’s not a shelter – they have support from the staff, the (St. Joseph and surrounding) parishes, and the community working with these ladies day in and day out,” she said. “We are showing and teaching many of them what they didn’t grow up with – how to cook, clean, be a good mom. We show them God’s love through our work and day to day interactions.”

Ferrell added, “There is tough love too. We have rules, responsibilities, and boundaries. We want them to be successful beyond here. We want them to reach their goals and as they transition out on their own, and we want them to know there is a great family of support here and in the community. We want to continue our relationship with them. We become family.”

The St. Joseph Pastor, Fr. Tom Gallagher, said funds from

the Catholic Sharing Appeal were used to build a much-needed deck, fence, playground, and outdoor furniture for the home by volunteers from the parish and surrounding areas.

It is the same sense of charity and loving Ferrell and her family found in Martinsburg nearly 19 years ago.

“I am not a cradle Catholic, but when my family moved here, we joined St. Joseph School and Church,” she said.

“It was life changing. The love we found was real, and we could see it through people living out their faith

“I want to show these young ladies that love – His love,” she said. “I hope I am showing them that I truly depend on God, and I want them to also. I want them to know how to turn to Him in prayer.”

As their website says, Ferrell echoed that, “Mary’s Refuge nurtures young mothers-to-be who feel like they’re not being listened to, have

nowhere to turn, and have no safe place to be.”

“We don’t know exactly how to put ourselves in their story, what their struggles are, but are here working hard to support them and this home, because we know it’s the right thing to do,” she said. “It’s what God taught us. And it’s also amazing to know that this home was once a convent and home to a group of sisters who worked for the Church and the school and the community. I can imagine that their souls are very happy.”

Get involved, get help, give support to Mary’s Refuge! For more info contact 304-350-1632, LIFE@MARYSREFUGE.COM. Make sure to check out their website at: MARYSREFUGE.COM.



FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading: Micah 5:1-4a

From Bethlehem shall come the Messiah.

Responsorial: Psalm 80

Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

Second Reading: Hebrews 10:5-10

Behold, I come to do your will. Christ saves us out of love to free us from sin.

Gospel: Luke 1:39-45

The visitation of Mary to Elizabeth – a true joy for Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit knowing Christ is in His mother's womb.

[CLICK HERE FOR FULL SCRIPTURE TEXT](#)

PRAYER INTENTIONS

For the Church, that like Mary we may eagerly bring Christ to our neighbors, rejoicing in God's presence in our world, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For all who are traveling to visit loved ones, that they may find joy in each other's company and may return home safely, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For expectant mothers, that they may realize their blessedness and the blessedness of the fruit of their womb, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For all of us, that our hearts may be worthy dwelling places for our Lord, enabling us to bring Christ to all whom we encounter, let us pray to the Lord. . .

Lord hear our prayer

As we prepare for the coming of the Lord, pause and give yourself time to reflect on the wish of St. Teresa of Calcutta to all,

“My prayer for you is that when Christ comes to you in Christmas,
He may find in you a warm home,
warm love like that of a heartful of love,
like that of a simple shepherd
who was the first one chosen to see Christ.”



Merry Christmas

THE NATIVITY THROUGH JOSEPH'S EYES

Editor's Note: The following is being reshared by request. It was written by Matt Charbonneau for Ascension Press Media and shared in FaithInWV for Christmas 2020. It is from the voice of St. Joseph. Charbonneau is a high school religious education teacher and writer for Ascension Press and others. The artwork of St. Joseph with the newborn Jesus is by Louisiana Catholic artist Nichole Lanthier available at: WWW.ETSY.COM/SHOP/NICHOLELANTHIER

ST. JOSEPH'S THAT FIRST CHRISTMAS

Wow! What a night!

As I sit here with Mary under the stars with angels singing from up above, I am in awe.

Can this really be happening?

Here we are after such a long and tiring journey, in a stable surrounded by animals. Try as we may, we were unable to secure better accommodations. I would have liked to have found a much more ideal place, but, evidently, the simplest spot has become the best one—a perfect setting for this blessed baby that has come into our life.

Yes, this most beautiful babe proves all of the travel and challenging conditions we faced to get here have all been worth it.

Watching Jesus in Mary's arms, I am captivated by his gaze, the twinkle in his eye as he looks at us adoringly. There is such a peace about him. Truly, Emmanuel, you have come. Indeed, God is with us.

Seeing the shepherds gather around and the Magi approach us with gifts for our child, I feel both humbled and honored.

The Son of God has arrived, and the Lord has chosen me along with my wife Mary to raise him and to teach him. Oh, how I am not worthy!

A noble carpenter, I am now charged with the enormous responsibility of being guardian of the Messiah. What a role to play in the history of this world!

I must admit I was somewhat leery when I first was visited

by the angel Gabriel. I was still processing Mary's news of her pregnancy and this revelation of a baby outside of our union really had me concerned. But as Gabriel assured me, it has all been part of God's plan.



So, just as God has placed his trust in me as deserving of this momentous life, I will place my trust in him that he will lead me along the right path regardless of my nerves and fears. As my ever-so-wise and beloved Mary reminds me, I am the servant of the Lord—may this be done to me according to his word.

Thankfully (but not surprisingly), God has stayed with me—with us—and we can now all enjoy this silent and most holy night together as a family.

As I look at Mary and admire her for both her purity and strength, I cannot help but also think of my ancestors and wonder how proud they must be

of this moment—Abraham, our people's patriarch, and his son Isaac, David, and his son Solomon.

How fitting I come from a line of distinction and royalty, for this blessed treasure my wife has borne is truly the King of kings.

There are many people who are now gradually trickling in, eager to meet baby Jesus. Mary and I both feel such a gift of life ought to be shared with all others, and we are happy to present God's Chosen One to all who wish to know him.

O God, let them come—let them all come, so all people may know and adore this Christ, our Lord.

THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

Eight Days Celebrating the Mystery of Christmas



Christmas



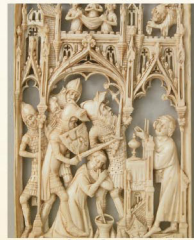
Feast of St. Stephen



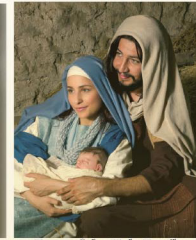
Feast of St. John the Evangelist



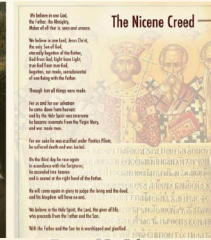
Feast of the Holy Innocents



Feast of St. Thomas Becket



Feast of the Holy Family



Feast of St. Sylvester



Mary, Mother of God

The Octave of Christmas is the eight days of Christmas beginning with the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord (Dec. 25) to Jan. 1, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God.

Here is brief summary to reflect upon each day.

The Feast of St. Stephen the First Martyr - Dec. 26th

Let us call upon St. Stephen, patron of deacons, to intercede for us as we pray for our permanent deacons, deacon candidates, and their families here in the diocese of Wheeling-Charleston.

St. Stephen was one of the first deacons of the Church appointed by the Apostles to serve the people with hearts charity and proclaim the Good News to all. The latter caused him to be hatefully persecuted. He continued his ministry. Irate crowds who despised the truth and wisdom of Christ physically removed him from the synagogue and stoned him to death.

The Feast of St. John the Evangelist - Dec. 27th

The Apostle John was so loved by Jesus that upon the cross he entrusted His Mother to his care. John was also a witness of the Transfiguration of Christ. He wrote the fourth Gospel, three Epistles and the Book of Revelation. He doesn't describe the birth of Christ in his Gospel, but alludes to it not with wonder but with great affirmation and no doubt. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..." John 1:14. His bible verse, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life," is one of the most quoted in history. Let us leave no doubt that we are Christians by our words, deeds, and devotions just like St. John the Evangelist.

The Feast of the Holy Innocents - Dec. 28th

This day reminds us of the ugly truth that King Herod had all boys under the age of two killed out of fear that one of them was Jesus, the newborn king. He was furious when the wisemen did not return to him to tell him where Jesus was. Our faith teaches us these innocent victims will wear the crown of martyrs in heaven forever honored by the angels and saints as the first witnesses to the newborn King.

Let the truths of this feast turn our hearts and minds to a present-day sadness, committing ourselves to pray for all those who were aborted, their parents, and those considering abortion.

The Feast of St. Thomas Becket - Dec. 29th

No matter the pressures in life or how challenging it may seem to keep the faith and hold sacred our religious obligations, let us recall the Divine loyalty of St. Thomas Becket.

As Archbishop of Canterbury in the 12th Century, St. Thomas

Becket defied the wishes of England's King Henry II. Saint Thomas refused to limit the freedoms of the Catholic Church and the faithful; he refused to denounce his faith; and at the hands of his murderers who stormed the cathedral said he is a "priest of God. For the name of Jesus and the protection of the Church, I am ready to embrace death."

The Feast of the Holy Family- Dec. 30th

We are all called to be holy families. We can find comfort in asking St. Joseph and our Blessed Mother to intercede for us, because they know all the emotions and trials of being a family. Let us call upon the Holy Family to strengthen us to encourage those in our life to become all that God has created them to be. Through Mary we know, "Nothing is impossible for God."

Focus on Joseph and his faithful obedience to ensure the safety of the Christ Child and our Blessed Mother. He trusted God with all his heart as he fled to Egypt to escape the rath of Herod. Let us stay faithful to God and our families under the watch of the angels no matter what is threatened.

The Feast of St. Sylvester - Dec. 31

Pope Saint Sylvester's papacy was from 314-335. He ruled at the time of Emperor Constantine who called for an ecumenical council, the first Council of Nicea to debate religious teachings. This led to the writing of the Nicene Creed, proclaiming "Jesus is true God of true God consubstantial with the Father."

Let us celebrate our faith, the Church, and all that we recite together at Mass as we say the Nicene Creed. St. Sylvester, intercede for us and continue to teach us how to serve each other as a united people.

The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God - Jan. 1st

A day to honor the Mary for saying yes to God to be the Blessed Mother of Jesus. It is fitting the Octave of Christmas concludes by showing our love and respect for Mary the Blessed Virgin and Mother of God. She is the ultimate example for every mother and those who live, love, and serve like mothers even when they don't have children of their own.

It is overwhelming to think about the relationship she must have had with her son our Lord and Savior. She nurtured Him through every stage of life. She taught Him to walk, speak, sing, dance, and clap His hands. She worried for Him through life's routine struggles and those that were overwhelming. She cried for Him, laughed with Him, and lived fully in faith for Him. On this solemnity we honor her. Blessed Mother, pray for us.

CHRISTMAS MORNING

First Reading: Isaiah 62:11-12

Your savior comes!

Responsorial: Psalm 97

A light will shine on us this day: the Lord is born for us.

Second Reading: Tim 3:4-7

Our savior appeared because of the generous love of our God. He saved us.

Gospel: Luke 2:15-20

When the angels left them, the Shepherds went to Bethlehem to find Mary and Joseph, and the Infant Lord in the manger.

[CLICK HERE FOR FULL SCRIPTURE TEXT](#)

PRAYER INTENTIONS

For the Church, Pope Francis, Bishop Mark, all the clergy, and all the faithful, may we always make room for Jesus in our hearts and bring him into the world by our prayer, words, and actions, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For the leaders of the world, that they never tire of working toward peace no matter the sacrifice, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For all those who are alone or away from us this Christmas, let their hearts be filled with the hope, comfort, and peace of Christ who unites us all, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For all who celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, may our actions and words reflect our elation - Emmanuel, God with us, let us pray to the Lord. . .

Lord hear our prayer

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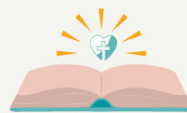
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MASS ONLINE

Saturday 6pm Masses will continue to be livestreamed from the Cathedral of St. Joseph, and will be available on our website each Sunday at DWC.ORG.