

HAPPY FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT!

While tomorrow we celebrate the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, today's readings take us to the moment Mary was visited by the Angel Gabriel.

On this Fourth Sunday of Advent, we celebrate love. We rediscover the moment Mary learned she would give birth to a child – the Messiah, God Himself.

Mary – a young teenager, humble, simple, frightened, and not even married – knew what was foretold, but never imagined it would be her that would bring Christ to the world.

Let us imagine ourselves in this scene as it builds up to the moment when we hear Mary say, “Be it done according to Thy word.”

She is the model we are all – women and men – called to be like, saying yes to God and having faith above all fear.

We share a special link today of a song written by Fr. Connor Danstrom, a National Eucharistic Revival Preacher and Director & Chaplain of The St. John Paul II Newman Center, University of Illinois – Chicago.

Father Danstrom writes it from the perspective of Angel Gabriel – the Annunciation and then a later vision of Mary singing to Jesus. Let the words of this song warm your heart and help you to fully embrace the wonderful mystery of Christmas about to come alive.

Listen to it here (the lyrics follow):

youtu.be/YunV1zI-rWo?si=nCM2GrC4YR7d1py4



THE ANNUNCIATION LYRICS

Late at night I came in through the window.

She slept soundly in an ordinary bed.

I whispered softly, “Hail, my gentle queen.”

Blinking slowly, she raised her holy head
and looked at me, and who was more afraid?

I, a servant, or she, so full of grace?

Then I told her there's no more need to wait,
and leaving lingered in that sanctuary place.

Late at night I saw my queen again,
singing sweetly songs she'd learned of old
of how her fathers had often gone astray,
and how He'd chase them, and how this was foretold.

And as He slept there, cradled in her arms,

I thought to tell her how this world
would break her heart.

How it'd pierce her, how this would have to end

But that can wait for now, the Child needs to be fed.

The production of the video is by Kevin Brown and Matt White, Browntown Communications.

The song is performed by Fr. Danstrom (guitar and vocals), Celeste Aguirre (vocals), and Daniel Sahyouni (cajón).



THE NATIVITY THROUGH JOSEPH'S EYES

Editor's Note: The following was written by Matt Charbonneau for Ascension Press Media and shared in FaithInWV for Christmas 2020. Read it as if St. Joseph is having a conversation with you. Charbonneau is a high school religious education teacher and writer for Ascension Press among others. The breathtaking artwork of St. Joseph "Midnight Adoration" is by Nichole Lanthier available at: www.etsy.com/shop/NicholeLanthier

IMAGINING JOSEPH'S THOUGHTS ON THE 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.

WE CAN BE THAT CLOSE TOO

Certainly, one can conceive many different interpretations or ideas of what must have been running through Joseph's head that blessed night in Bethlehem.

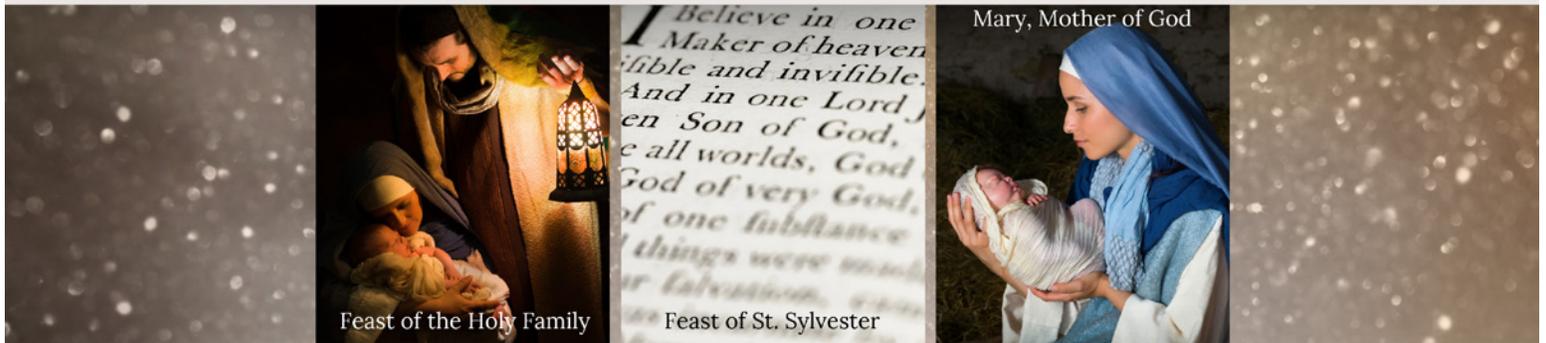
Whatever the thought, I gather exhilaration would be among the sentiments and experiences.

So, may the joy of that night be renewed in our society today, as we journey this Christmas season ever closer to Jesus. – Matt Charbonneau



THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

Eight days to celebrate the mystery of Christmas



The Octave of Christmas is eight days of celebrating the mysteries 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 a summation of the Christmas octave days that fall after Christmas Day:

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

Let us call upon St. Stephen, patron of deacons, to interceded 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 Faither."

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 Hm, and lived fully in faith for Him. On this solemnity we honor her. Blessed Mother, pray for us.

May God bless each one of us as we make time to reflect on and experience in our hearts and minds what God is revealing to us during these Octave Days.

Then through the Epiphany on January 5, and the official end of the Christmas Season with the Baptism of the Lord, on January 12; let us renew our adoration of the Prince of Peace who came to walk among us and lead us to Heaven.

CELEBRATE
THE **E**IGHT **D**AYS OF **C**HRISTMAS

Women's Discernment Retreat

June 21-23, 2024

DIOCESE ANNOUNCES WOMEN'S DISCERNMENT RETREAT

The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston is pleased to announce the 2024 Women's Discernment Retreat set for June 21-23, 2024, at St. Joseph Retreat Center, Wheeling, WV for single women ages 18 and over, who are wondering where God's calling them to be.

Religious life? Marriage? Single life? This retreat is an opportunity to ask, listen, reflect, and experience Sisterhood and help you discern your vocation.

In the Church we naturally immediately think of the call to the priesthood, when we hear: "Pray for vocations;" "Discernment Weekend;" and "Shepherds of the flock." In this moment we want to shift our focus to women in the Church to the first of hopefully many discernment retreats for Catholic women in WV, said SR. Martha Gomez, RGS, and Delegate for Consecrated Life in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston.

Having the opportunity to spend time away from all distractions to listen closely to your heart and what God wants for you is invaluable, said Fr. Brian Crenwelge, Director of Vocations for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston.

"God calls each of us to a particular vocation," he said. "To some, he whispers on their hearts that he wants them to give of their whole lives to him in a radical way--to consecrate themselves to him so as to follow him more closely and live now like we will live in heaven.

"The religious vocation is ultimately a vocation of love. It is a self-giving that receives a hundredfold back from God in return. Every young woman before she considers marriage should first consider whether or not Christ wants her to follow after him more deeply through this life of total consecration. What a gift it is!"

Religious sisters from various religious orders will assist at the retreat by sharing their testimonies and providing a joyful witness of what it means to be a consecrated Religious Sister.

"Think of discernment as discovery," Sr. Martha said. "We all need to discover what Christ wants for us by discerning one vocation at a time, one step at a time. This June retreat will help the ladies in our diocese to prayerfully experience a glimpse of life as a religious sister - one of commitment, prayer, and community."

Religious sisters serving in the diocese are representative of more than 20 communities/congregations.

"Our Women's Discernment Retreat will be a well-deserved time to get to know yourself, your heart, and how Christ is working in your life," Sr. Martha said. "In a world that lacks silence because of the noise of opinions, confusion, fear, and mistrust it can be easy for us to ignore our callings. It is so important to take advantage of moments like this one when you can give your heart, mind, and purpose attention, while being in the presence of other faithful women."

It is important to register as soon as possible, as space is limited to less than 10 women in order to provide a special attention and experience for the attendees, she said. As part of the registration process candidates will need to include a letter of reference from their pastor, Catholic school principal, campus minister, or director of religious education.

The retreat is free.

To register go to: DWC.ORG/2024-WOMENS-DISCERNMENT-RETREAT/

For more information email Sister Martha Gomez, RGS, at mgomez@dwc.org or call the Office of Consecrated Life at (304)233-0880 ext. 264.

Women's Discernment Retreat



DIOCESE OF
WHEELING-CHARLESTON

www.dwc.org



June 21-23, 2024 St. Joseph Retreat Center, Wheeling, WV



The Office of Consecrated Life presents a discernment retreat for single Catholic women ages 18 and over. In a world that lacks moments of silence and reflection it can be easy for us to ignore our callings. Join us and take this time to get to know yourself, your heart, and how Christ is working in your life.

- ✦ Retreat is free.
- ✦ Be with other discerning women.
- ✦ Register now - space is limited!



To Register/More Info:



Sister Martha Gomez, RGS,
mgomez@dwc.org



Office of Consecrated Life
(304)233-0880 ext. 264

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DEC. 24

First Reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14 a, 16

The kingdom of David shall endure forever before the Lord.

Responsorial: Psalm 89

“Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.”

Second Reading: Romans 16:25-27

The mystery kept secret for ages has now been manifested.

Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary and she conceived of the Holy Spirit.

[CLICK HERE FOR FULL SCRIPTURE TEXT](#)

BIBLE.USCCB.ORG/BIBLE/READINGS/122423.CFM



THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD (DAWN OF CHRISTMAS)

DEC. 25

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: Titus 3:4-7

God sent Jesus Christ our savior to give us the hope of eternal life.

Gospel: Luke 2:15-20

The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem to find Jesus in the manger. When they departed the Holy Family they glorified and praised God to all about what they had witnessed.

[CLICK HERE FOR FULL SCRIPTURE TEXT](#)

BIBLE.USCCB.ORG/BIBLE/READINGS/122523-DAWN.CFM

PRAYER INTENTIONS

For the Church, that we echo Mary’s words—
“May it be done to me according to your
word”—when we hear God’s call, let us pray
to the Lord. . .

For leaders of nations, that they may imitate
the concern that King David showed for the
ark of God in respecting God’s presence in
their lands and in their people, let us pray to
the Lord. . .

For new parents and expectant parents, that
they may see the presence of the Lord in the
new life they have brought into the world and
into their homes, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For all who are traveling to visit family or
friends over the holidays, that they may be
kept safe from harm as they share the joy and
love of the season, let us pray to the Lord. . .

Lord hear our prayer

PRAYER INTENTIONS

For the Church, that we may be light to the
world by word and deed, let us pray to the
Lord. . .

For all nations, that they may lay down their
arms and work tirelessly to build a world that
is forever peaceful, following the example of
the Prince of Peace, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For migrants, refugees, outcasts, and all those
who are homeless, that they may never be
told that there is no room for them in the
inn, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For those for whom this time of year is
difficult, due to grief, stress, or family
tension, that they may find comfort in the
knowledge that God remains with us through
all our hardships, let us pray to the Lord. . .

Lord hear our prayer

Faith IN WV

DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

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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.