Faith IN WV
DECEMBER 25, 2025
DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

# Merry Christmas

## God Speaks to His Shepherds Are We Listening?

On Christmas night, God chose the shepherds as the first to hear the Good News. They were ordinary people, doing an ordinary job, minding their own business on the hills outside Bethlehem. In that simple setting, God revealed something extraordinary.

Through the shepherds, we learn an important Christmas message meant for every one of us—no matter our age, our background, or even how confident we feel in our Catholic faith. The shepherds show us that we are all called to be humble, attentive, and ready to respond when God speaks.

When the angel appeared, Luke tells us they were utterly terrified. Their hearts must have been pounding, while their minds were racing with confusion and fear. Then the angel spoke. "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people. . . to you is born this day. . . a Savior." (Luke 2:10–11)

## *A Hidden Gift of Faith:*

### *The Sisters' Mural Rediscovered in Martinsburg*

The mural featured for this special FaithInWV edition was discovered in the attic of the former convent—now Mary's Refuge in Martinsburg—on the campus of St. Joseph High School, between St. Joseph Grade School and St. Joseph Church. Mary's Refuge Director Allison Ferrell treasures the breathtaking artwork of a unique scene. Notably absent? The Nativity.

A little history: The convent was once home to the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. According to Archivist Jon-Erik Gilot of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, the sisters arrived in the Eastern Panhandle in 1838, when Martinsburg was part of Virginia and the Diocese of Richmond, to staff St. Vincent's Female Benevolent School, which operated until 1841. The school reopened in 1883 as St. Joseph's Parochial School.

Although the mural is unsigned, it is believed that one or more of the sisters painted the serene scene and decoupaged the angels and kings. Delegate for Consecrated Life Sister Martha Gomez, RGS, said the painting may have been used as a backdrop for a live Nativity scene or school play. However, the painting in its own right gives the viewer a glimpse of the announcement, the anticipation, and the emphasis of hoping, seeking, and believing, she said.

More than 200 Daughters of Charity served in Martinsburg until August 2014, when the congregation withdrew from West Virginia. Only four sisters lived in the convent at that time - three were reassigned to other states, and Sr. Margaret Ann Wooden stayed to complete her assignment as a first-grade teacher at St. Joseph Grade School.

God knew exactly who He was speaking to. He chose people who likely felt unimportant or overlooked. And still, God trusted them with the greatest announcement the world had ever heard.

Let this remind us that God knows us too—our doubts, our overthinking, our fears, and our hesitations. He meets us right where we are.

After the angels praised God and returned to heaven, the shepherds did something remarkable: they went!

"Let us go, then, to Bethlehem. . ." (Luke 2:15). They left their fields, their routines, and their comfort zones. They didn't delay. They didn't say they were too busy. They made God their priority.

As we look at our Nativity scenes, imagine that moment—the shepherds racing through the night, breathing hard, hearts full of wonder, a bit anxious until they came face to face with the infant Jesus.

They saw.

They believed.

And they shared everything they had been told, "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen." (Luke 2:20)

That is our call too.

We are asked to watch over our own "fields"—our homes, families, friendships, workplaces, and communities—and to be attentive to God's presence there. Society often tells us we are too busy, or that faith can be lived privately without the Church. But Christmas reminds us that God asks for first place in our lives, not just once in a while.

Like the shepherds, we are called to share the Good News—not perfectly, not loudly, but faithfully. By our words and our actions, we are invited to share Christ's love, mercy, hope, and joy. Sometimes that means inviting someone to church. Sometimes it means welcoming someone back. Sometimes it simply means being kind, patient, forgiving, and present.

God is not asking us to be angels—just shepherds - ordinary people who notice when God speaks, who are willing to step out of their comfort zones, and who allow Christ to be seen through them.

This Christmas, may we pause, like the shepherds, and choose to go to Bethlehem. May we give God our hearts, make Him our priority, and joyfully share what we have seen and believed: that a Savior has been born for us all.

## Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston

# Join Us for Mass of the Nativity of the Lord

## Thursday, December 25 • 12:00am

### Bishop Mark Brennan - celebrant

### from the Cathedral of Saint Joseph, Wheeling

**Mass Livestreamed**

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**Mass will be Broadcast Live**

WTRF-TV7/CBS Wheeling

WDVM Martinsburg

WVNS/CBS Beckley/Bluefield

WOWK/CBS Charleston/Huntington

WBOY/NBC Clarksburg/Morgantown

Contact your parish for Christmas Mass times

Christmas

Feast of St. Stephen

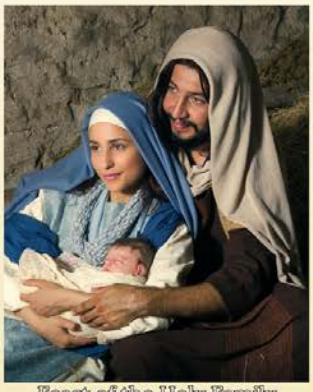
Feast of St. John the Evangelist

Feast of the Holy Innocents

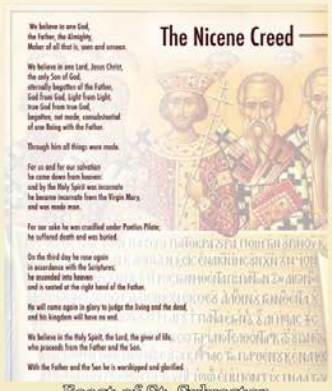
# CHRISTMAS OCTAVE

## *Eight Days of Celebrating the Mystery of Christmas*

Feast of St. Thomas Becket



Feast of the Holy Family




Feast of St. Sylvester

Mary, Mother of God

DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

www.dwc.org

# EIGHT DAYS OF GLORY

## REJOICE IN THE FULL LIGHT OF CHRISTMAS!

Christmas does not end on December 25—it begins there. The Church, in her wisdom, invites us to linger in the joy of the Nativity through the eight days of Christmas, known as the Octave of Christmas.

These sacred days unfold as a hymn of praise, drawing our hearts deeper into the mystery of Christ's birth and the powerful witnesses who followed Him with courage, love, and unwavering faith.

From martyrdom to motherhood, from sacrifice to steadfast hope, let each day offer a reason to celebrate, reflect, and renew our commitment to live as joyful disciples of the newborn King. Think of this time as a walk from the manger on Christmas Day to the loving arms of Mary, Mother of God, as we celebrate the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God on Jan. 1. Do so with gratitude, pride in our faith, and confident hope in God's saving promise. So, throughout blessed days of the octave keep the spirit of Christmas fully alive, letting these days build us up for the arrival of the wise men – the three kings –bowing before the tiny Babe Jesus – the Epiphany.

### 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 interceded 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.

# CHRIST'S HANDS AND WHEELS IN WEST VIRGINIA

## *St. James the Greater in Charles Town, Where Actions Speak*

*Marie Nuar, who works in St. James' accounting office, wrote the following St. Simon of Cyrene Trucking Ministry feature story to share with our FaithInWV readers:*

As a parish community, St. James the Greater in Charles Town has historically aimed to put faith in action by living out the Corporal Works of Mercy, including clothing the naked and feeding the hungry.

Twenty-seven years ago, St. James Parishioners, Guy Chicchirichi and Jay Carroll, along with their friend Jack Cook, began a regular ministry driving furniture and clothes south to Webster County and wherever else needed.

The ministry caught on and soon parishioners were gathering more donations. Wilmar and Denise Davis stepped up and offered a covered porch to store items between deliveries. Bountiful blessings resulted in quickly outgrowing Davises' front porch, so, Chicchirichi offered an old warehouse by the VFW for collecting and storing the donations.

Mary Baker and Liz Hooe would get up early to come and sort the clothes, packing them into banana boxes for easier loading of rented 26-foot trucks used for the haul.

On one trip, inspired by the phrase "in God we trust" Carroll made the comment that "for God we truck".

It stuck and became the group motto.

In fact, the beloved tagline literally and figuratively carried over into the parish's Living Stations of the Cross through the main street of Charles Town - because a truck was necessary to help carry the heavy solid wood cross to the starting point for the Stations. So, fitting for the latter blessing of using a truck , Carroll noted "we are like Simon of Cyrene helping Jesus to carry the Cross"..

And so, the ministry received its name – The St. Simon of Cyrene Trucking Ministry – for God we truck!

Simon of Cyrene Trucking

Frank and Angie Gift, purveyors of craft wine, had a box truck that they drove to various craft sales. When Frank died in 2005, St. James was able to purchase the truck from Angie.

Fourteen years later, the parish acquired its first refrigerated truck, thanks to a donation of $75,000 from the WV Catholic Foundation (WVCF).

The Fleet currently consists of: four pick-up trucks (including one brand new one thanks to an anonymous donor of $80,000 in 2023); three box trucks (including two donated by Greg and Debbie Martin); two refrigerated box trucks; and one refrigerated trailer, for $38,628, thanks to two grants, one for $15,000 from the WVCF and the other for $23,648 from the Catholic Sharing Appeal (CSA).

If keeping up with the Christmas Spirit and the mindset of the season, one could jokingly remark that it sounds a bit like St. James' true love likes to give trucks, not birds or pear trees.

### TRUCK MINISTRY EXPANDED FOR VITAL FOR FOOD NEEDS

First Fruits Farm in Freeland, Maryland was founded in 1998 specifically to donate fresh produce to organizations serving needy families and individuals. After the devasting floods in 2016, they had extra potatoes and wanted to help out. St. James had a vehicle and the ability to transport the food to those who needed it. 50,000 pounds were shipped that year to support flood relief efforts. And so began the food portion of the Trucking Ministry and a partnership that continues till today.

Last year, Barbara Riley, who heads up coordinating the food delivery ministry volunteers, requested and gratefully received a CSA Grant for $10,000.

Routinely serving more than 35 food banks throughout WV to bring fresh food to food deserts and those in need, the demands put on the truck were taking its toll. The ministry was in need of a new truck.

Saint James the Greater parish family was able to raise the necessary funds of $149,641 including a matching grant from the Bob and Susan Sheeley Foundation. This enabled the purchase of a new refrigerated truck, along with the extended warranties to keep it functioning for years into the future, as tens of thousands of miles are put on the truck each year.

### NEW TRUCK BLESSED AND READY TO ROLL FAR BEYOND THE PANHANDLE

The new refrigerated truck, which was blessed by Bishop Mark Brennan on September 6, has all the newest safety features and a larger lift gate, making the delivery of pallets much easier. It can go to -20° allowing us to ship frozen as well as fresh items. There is a standby unit with both an onboard generator and an electric hook-up, which will help facilitate transporting items to pantries that don't have their own storage capabilities, allowing the ministry to expand into areas of the state experiencing the highest rates of food insecurity and provide more timely deliveries of fresh food to the food pantries we serve.

Pastor Fr. Timothy Grassi, said "This truck is just one more opportunity for the people of St. James the Greater in Charles Town to not only be the hands and feet of Jesus, but to be a reflection of his love beyond Charles Town throughout the diocese."

### YES! BEYOND BOUNDARIES

St. Simon of Cyrene Trucking Ministry collects and delivers fresh produce, milk, eggs, meat, and other foodstuffs to local food pantries and church outreach ministries throughout the state as far south as McDowell County, delivering over half a million pounds of food a year. Almost 100% of the food shipped is given away at food banks outside of our parish boundaries.

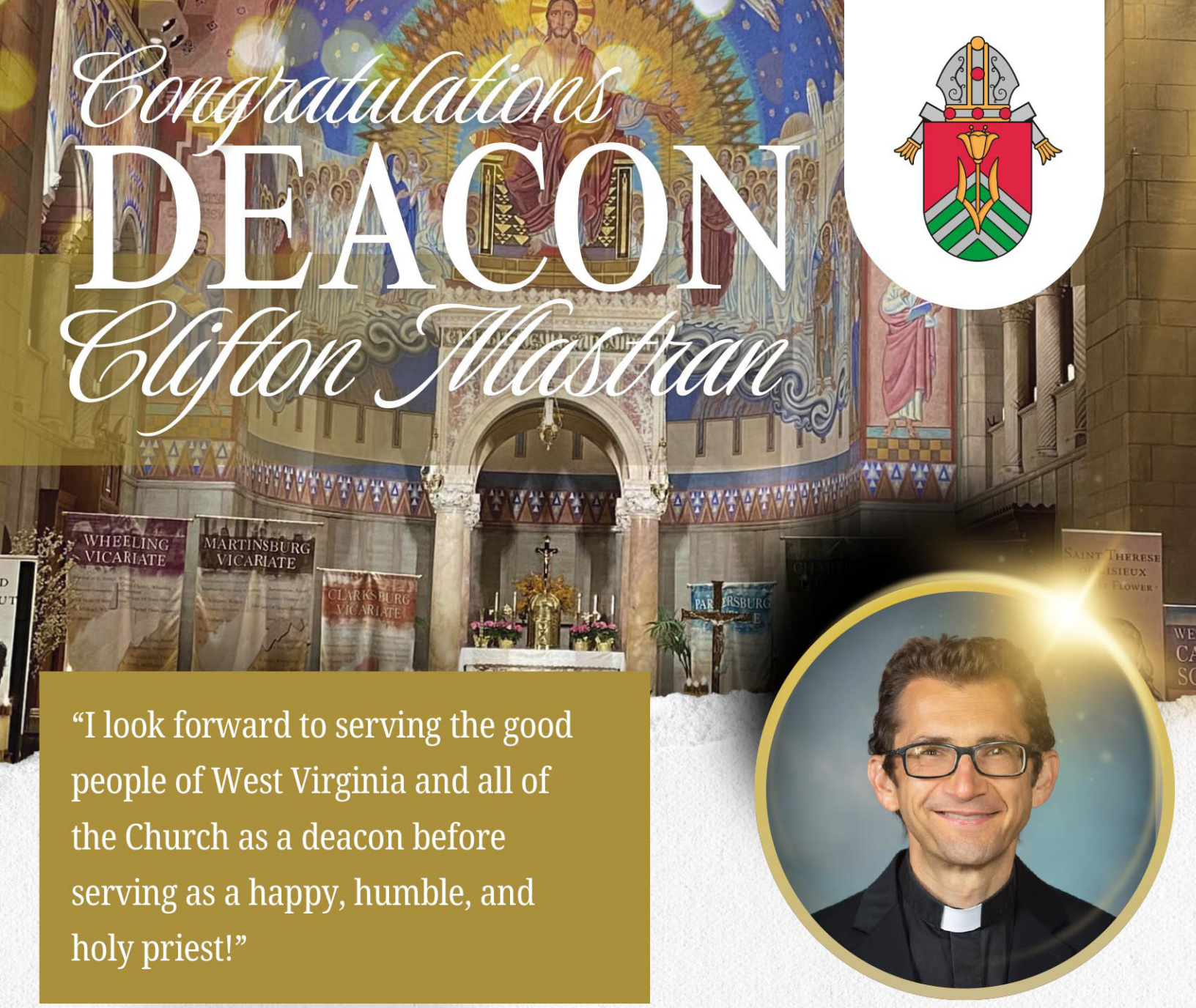
Volunteers handle the food acquisition and distribution for local pantry giveaways, headed by Barbara Reilly and Glenn Geoghegan. Because of the time commitment needed to transport food around the state, most of our volunteers are retired parishioners, braving dicey road conditions as the temperatures drop, often driving in the dark hours of the morning, or long into the night. They can spend hours on the road at a time to get the food where it needs to go. The food pantries served are very grateful for the assistance that we are able to offer thanks to the generosity of our parishioners.

Deanna Palmer, Executive Director of the Lewis County Family Resource Network in Weston, WV puts it into words. "We are so very appreciative of St. James Church and First Fruits Farms for the beautiful, fresh produce and food items that we have received. With recent federal cuts to food programming, and increased food needs in our community, fresh produce is vital to providing nutritious options via our Food Pantry."

The average yearly cost of maintaining the ministry is $75,000. Our biggest expenses are fuel and maintenance for our fleet of trucks and trailers. While mostly funded by our parishioners, we have had others, including non-parishioners and non-Catholics send contributions to support the ministry.

For as long as our parishioners and others keep donating their time to drive and money for repairs and gas, the St. Simon of Cyrene Trucking Ministry, Food Division will keep on rolling, spreading the love of God!

# Congratulations DEACON Clifton Mastran




"I look forward to serving the good people of West Virginia and all of the Church as a deacon before serving as a happy, humble, and holy priest!"



JUBILEE 2025 PILGRIMS OF HOPE

Bishop Mark Brennan will Honor the Solemn Closing of the Jubilee Year of Hope with the celebration of Mass at 10:30 am on Dec. 28, the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, at the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Wheeling.

As the Jubilee Year of Hope draws to a close, the Diocese of Wheeling–Charleston gives thanks for twelve grace-filled months in which the Holy Spirit gathered the faithful as true pilgrims of hope. From the Opening Masses celebrated on December 29, 2024, at the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Wheeling and the Basilica of the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Charleston, the people of God were invited to enter into a sacred journey marked by reconciliation, unity, and renewed trust in the promises of God.

Pope Leo XIV will celebrate the official close of the Vatican Jubilee Year on January 6, 2026 from St. Peter's in Rome.

## THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD
## (DAWN OF CHRISTMAS)

DECEMBER 25, 2025

**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

## PRAYER INTENTIONS

For the Church, Pope Leo XIV, Bishop Mark Brennan, the priests in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, our consecrated men and women, and all who keep the Church fully alive in West Virginia, that we may be light to the world by word and deed, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For all nations especially in the Holy Land and corners of the world that do not know Christ, 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 struggling to survive, 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*

# Encounter with Jesus

## JANUARY 10TH & 11TH 2026

"THE MOST BEAUTIFUL AND STIRRING ADVENTURE THAT CAN HAPPEN TO YOU IS THE PERSONAL MEETING WITH JESUS, WHO IS THE ONLY ONE WHO GIVES REAL MEANING TO OUR LIVES".

-ST. JOHN PAUL II

AGES 18-30

CONTACT: (304) 240-6835

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DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

# 2026 Men's Discernment Retreat

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FEBRUARY 13 - FEBRUARY 15

PRIESTFIELD PASTORAL CENTER
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- OPEN TO MEN 18 AND OLDER
- PRAY, SHARE MEALS, AND MEET WITH CURRENT WV SEMINARIANS
- HEAR TALKS ABOUT PRIESTLY LIFE AND DISCERNMENT

Register Today!

# HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY, & JOSEPH

**First Reading: Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14**

Give merit to kindness. Genuine kindness can mend sinful ways. Let kindness take root in your heart.

**Responsorial: Psalm 128**

"Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in His ways."

**Second Reading: Colossians 3:12-21**

As God has forgiven you, show mercy, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience to others. Let Christ's peace control your hearts.

**Gospel: Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23**

Out of Egypt I called my son.

CLICK HERE FOR FULL SCRIPTURE TEXT

## PRAYER INTENTIONS

For the Church, embodied in our families, may we always be strengthened in faith and the Eucharist, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For world leaders, that they abandon all prejudice and work for justice and peace, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For those who struggle to keep their family together or to reestablish bonds with those who have been estranged, that the Holy Family may strengthen them in their efforts, let us pray to the Lord. . .

That we may all work to break down barriers that divide us, finding unity in our diversity in our families, parishes, and greater community, let us pray to the Lord. . .

*Lord hear our prayer*

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*Liturgy of the Hours*

# LITURGY OF THE HOURS

**Pray the prayer for this day, this hour!** EBREVIARY.COM LITURGY OF THE HOURS

Scan the QR code or visit the link below to view a PDF version of the Liturgy of the Hours.

## 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.