

The G...R...R... "Home" Page

Number 4

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Advent Symbol - The Wreath

What is this Advent wreath whose four candles help us mark the passing of the weeks before Christmas? It is eternity's clock—a circle that says "In our ending is our beginning." It is the wheel of time—a circle of evergreen branches—cut and left to wither—revealing that death and life are both of a piece. It is also a crown, the victor's laurel garland, the sign that the race is done, the prize won. It is the crown of us as a people, a chosen race, a royal priesthood. It is the crown of each of us as individuals—baptized individuals (all of a piece) whose heads were smeared with that royal oil, chrism. We are marked for eternity. With four candles lit, the Advent wreath is the fiery crown that we give to Christ the King, the Savior who returns in the growing gloom to gather us into our eternal home, the new and heavenly Jerusalem.

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Advent: A Sense of the Season

December is the time for expressing the hope and strengthening the dreams that will carry us through the next year. Advent is the way we as church express our hopes. Prophetic visions, prayers and songs calling for the Lord to come do help us to hope profoundly. Advent allows us to do what most others do in December—but to see in the coming Lord the answer to our dreams. In our Catholic tradition, keeping Advent means singing the songs of expectation, of our hopes and longing, before we enter into the full-throated praise of Christmas carols.

Here are a few lines from our tradition on what Advent is about. "Advent has a twofold character: as a season to prepare us for Christmas when Christ's first coming is remembered; as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and the heart to await Christ's second coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation." (General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar, #39) Thomas Merton, in his book *Seasons of Celebration*, reviewed the ways Saint Bernard of Clairvaux approached these comings of Christ. The first advent was Christ's birth. The other will be at the end of time. Faith in these two stimulates recognition of a third, the advent of Christ in our church now, today. Viewed from this perspective, the Advent liturgy, with its scriptures, prayers and songs, is neither a romantic return to the Old Testament while we wait for the baby at Bethlehem, nor is it an exercise in expressing hope for an ever-receding end of time. The Advent liturgy is neither nostalgic nor illusory. When we take the tradition and enter it fully, we become Advent, the people in and through whom Christ comes.

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LOOKING FOR A NAME

Welcome to our "Home Page"; when we started this little publication, we used the "Home Page" title as we wanted to identify this as something unique, not just a part of the parish bulletin. So we need a name - and we invite suggestions for this publication. You can drop off ideas on the website, either in the BLOG link or in the guestbook. If you want to do it in a more conventional way, call the parish office, or write your suggestion and drop it in the collection basket on Sunday. The contents of this publication, along with a lot of other information can be found on the Internet at <http://www.geocities.com/saintmaryspg/> for those who are computer savvy and connected! And we've added a BLOG link on the page, for your discussion, comments, and suggestions!!

WELCOME ADVENT

You are invited to begin the season of Advent with a solemn celebration of Vespers on Sunday, November 27 at 4:30 p.m. in the Church. Come and join in this ancient and official prayer of the Church, part of the Church's daily cycle of prayer and praise.

On the back page you will find two articles pertaining to Advent. As we celebrate the season, there are many symbols that we use to help us enter into a full, conscious, active celebration of the season and of our faith. Advent is primarily a time of waiting and of preparation, of expectation and hope. We do well to step back at times from the busyness of life and reflect on our hopes and expectations, to reflect on our lives of faith and our response to the Lord's invitation to "Come, follow me".

As we celebrate we remember especially that Jesus came in love to save us, to make us the people of God, and through us, to continue his work of praising the Father and saving the world.

BAPTISM PREPARATION FOR OLDER CHILDREN

We're going to hold another series of sessions after Christmas, hosted here at St. Mary's. If your child would like to be baptized, please phone Giselle at the parish office.

PASTORAL TEAM TIDBITS

Last weekend (Nov 10-13), Giselle was in Kelowna for the Western Conference of Catholic Religious Educators. This weekend (Nov 19-20), she's actually here in Prince George, but teaching for the Lay Formation programme. We'll pin her down here one of these days!!

Richard joined the community of St. Andrew's in Fraser Lake on November 6 for the 25th anniversary of the renaming of the parish and the opening of the new Church. It was a joyful celebration of the life of that community and brought together many of the former pastors and parishioners, along with those who are presently part of that community. The next couple of weeks are stay at home weeks, with teaching and presiding at Liturgy at the Lay Formation program at the Renewal Centre and involvement in the Regional Mission the main focus. The first week of December will include Sunday liturgy in McBride (4th) and a pastoral visit to Fort Ware (6th-8th).



IT'S HERE!!! CHILDREN'S LITURGY OF THE WORD

Have you noticed it?? They're cute and they're shy, but they're kind of hard to miss. Each week, for the past few Sundays, a group of youngsters has been leaving Mass to have their own Liturgy of the Word. We're still ironing out some kinks in terms of logistics. Remember that these little people are the church of tomorrow and a smile is all it takes sometimes to brighten their day!

SUNDAY BULLETINS FOR CHILDREN

Don't miss out!!! We've ordered in lots, enough for every child under the age of about 10. So, get one for each of your little ones. We have some for the younger crowd (4-5 year olds) and some for the older ones (6-9 year olds). Don't forget to pick some up when you leave the Church!! They're not only fun, but educational too.



WANTED: USED CHILDREN'S ARCH BOOKS

Does anyone have any Arch Books lying around the house, or stored away in boxes? Have your children long outgrown them? We could use some for our Children's Liturgy of the Word! Please call the parish office or drop them off if you wish. Thanks!



CONFIRMATION FOR TEENS

Do you know a teen or a pre-teen (10-12) who's received Baptism and First Communion but hasn't been confirmed yet? If so, now's the time to step forward! We're going to have confirmation preparation starting soon. Phone Giselle at the office for more information.

REMEMBERING CHURCH

Do you know someone who has drifted away from the Catholic Church? This fall, after the OMI Parish Mission in November, St. Mary's Parish and Sacred Heart Cathedral will be hosting a series of gatherings to Welcome Home all inactive Catholics. Please phone Giselle at the parish office for more information.

RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

In case you've been wondering... yes we are participating in the RCIA process this fall, together with Sacred Heart Cathedral and Immaculate Conception Parish. At this point in time however, St. Mary's has no active catechumens or candidates. We're always open to interested parties!! Also, please note the schedule for the next few Mondays:

Nov 21 All are invited to attend the OMI Mission Great Assemblies at Sacred Heart.

Nov 28 RCIA is back on track and meeting at 7 pm in the Conference Room!!!

HOSPITALITY

At Parish Pastoral Council, we spent an extended period of time discussing and reflecting on the topic of Hospitality. As Church, we are called to be a welcoming, hospitable, nurturing community of faith, continuing the mission of Jesus of proclaiming the Good News and bringing others to experience the Father's love.

When we hear the word hospitality, we might immediately think of greeters at the door, or having coffee after Mass. However, hospitality is much more than this. It is first of all an attitude, one that each member of the assembly should have and live. It is an attitude of welcome, being aware of those around us, being aware of how we can invite others to join us or push them away. For example, if everyone is sitting at the ends of the pews and at the back of the Church, when others come in, they see a "full" Church, and are hesitant to look for a place to sit in the assembly, even though the whole centre of each pew block may be empty. Moving in to the centre of the pews leaves empty spaces that people can easily see and that invite them into the assembly. Taking a moment to acknowledge someone who sits next to us is a small thing, but it lets the other person know that he or she is visible, is welcomed, is a part of the community. It could be as simple as a smile or a nod, but it is important to be acknowledged. (More on this topic later)