

Saint Bernadette Parish

Saint Mary Parish

1343 Wheeling Road NE (740) 654 • 1893
LANCASTER, OH 43130-8701

602 Marietta Street (740) 569 • 7929
BREMEN, OH 43107

[stbernadetteparish . net](http://stbernadetteparish.net)



Madonna and Child

This delicate painting of the virgin Mary and the child Jesus is featured on one of the United States Postal Service's Christmas stamps for 2016.

Painted (1470) by a follower of Fra Filippo Lippi and Pesellino
now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington

the first sunday of advent

November 27, 2016

our parishes

AT BOTH PARISHES

Fr Thomas Kessler	pastor	(614) 634-0499	wmthomaskessler@icloud.com
Kathy Kehnast	pastoral coordinator	(740) 654-1893	stbernparrish@yahoo.com
Angie & Kent Kerns	religious education	(740) 654-2588	kwkerns@gmail.com
Julie & Chase Stalford	youth ministry	(740) 808-7294	maristellaspirt@gmail.com
Nikki Schmelzer	bookkeeper	(740) 654-1893	businessmstbparish@yahoo.com

AT BREMEN ST MARY PARISH

Ben Factor	liturgical music		b_factor@lancaster.k12.oh.us
Jim Schmelzer	maintenance chair	(740) 215-3894	
Tyna Fox-Schmelzer	religious education	(614) 371-7702	schmelifox@earthlink.net
Bremen St Vincent de Paul		(740) 569-3710	

The St Mary Parish office is at the church vestibule.
Hours are 9-11 AM, Tu 602 Marietta St, Bremen, OH 43107 (740) 569-7929

AT ST BERNADETTE PARISH

Deacon Mark Scarpitti		(740) 438-3970	dcn.mark@frontier.com
Deacon Jeff Carpenter		(740) 681-9918	carpenter.227@osu.edu
Ann Essman	pastoral minister	(740) 653-9347	aessman001@att.net
Steve Huber	facilities coordinator	(740) 654-3137	shuber57@yahoo.com
Liz Latorre	liturgical music	(740) 243-1872	lizlatorre@gmail.com

The St Bernadette Parish office is in the Mary Good Center, across the back parking lot from the school.
Hours are: 9 AM-1 PM, M W Th F; 11 AM-1 PM, Tu 1343 Wheeling Rd NE, Lancaster, OH 43130

AT ST BERNADETTE SCHOOL

Pam Eltringham	principal	(740) 654-3137	peltring@cducation.org
Barb Huber	secretary	(740) 654-3137	bhuber@cducation.org

Saint Bernadette School is at 1325 Wheeling Rd, Lancaster, OH 43130-8701 stbernlan@cducation.org www.stbernadetteschool.com

our sacramental life

BAPTISM

To have a child baptized, you must register and attend a class as a couple (unless attendance just isn't possible, in which case some discussion with Kathy Kehnast will be necessary). Sessions are held quarterly for both parishes. The next session will be Wednesday, Nov 30. Take the class before your child is born. If you are expecting, call Kathy to register for the class.

Please don't ask if you "have to go." This is an opportunity to meet with parents of children about the same age as your little one; they are in the same wonderful boat as you are.

At least one parent must be a practicing Catholic. **Both godparents need to be practicing Christians, at least one a practicing Catholic.** If you don't attend Sunday Mass regularly, there is something you can do about it: Start coming to Sunday Mass. If you can't come (health, severe weather, employment requirements, etc.), speak to your confessor. He will help you.

PENANCE

The priest is available for Penance

- at St Bernadette Saturdays at 3 PM and Thursdays at 5:30 PM, and
- at St Mary Bremen on Sunday at 8 AM.

In addition to Advent and Lenten Penance Services, every Catholic priest is available whenever there is a need. There are Penance opportunities for parochial school children **four times during the year so that they will**

let us pray together

WITH THE CHURCH THIS WEEK

Grant us, we pray, O Lord our God, the constant gladness of being devoted to you, for it is full and lasting happiness to serve with constancy the author of all that is good.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

WITH THE POPE DURING NOVEMBER

His universal intention is:
That countries which take in a displaced persons and refugees may find support for their efforts which show solidarity.

His evangelization intention is:
That within parishes, priests and lay people may collaborate in service to the community without giving in to the temptation of discouragement.

ANOIDING OF THE SICK

learn the beauty of frequent confession. The Church's law requires us to receive the sacrament of Penance at least once a year.

The Sick receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick **when dangerously ill, facing major surgery, or suffering from the ravages of old age.**

We celebrate the sacrament communally at a Sunday Mass before Advent and during the Easter season so that we can all pray with you for "health of mind and body."

And, we are happy to bring Penance, Anointing, and Holy Communion to the homes or hospitals of the sick or shut in. It is very helpful to **call the parish office to let us know before a hospitalization or when it has been too long** since the sacraments were last available.

HOLY MATRIMONY

Couples wishing to marry sacramentally should contact the parish office six months before they wish to celebrate the sacrament. Why so long? Because **this sacrament, not just the ceremony, requires serious preparation.** And the Church needs to be involved in that preparation. She tries to support couples through the years of their married life. For this reason our diocese offers programs to enhance married life. To learn how, watch the weekly bulletin.

WITH THE POPE DURING DECEMBER

His universal intention is:
That the scandal of child-soldiers may be eliminated the world over.

His evangelization intention is:
That the peoples of Europe may rediscover the beauty, goodness, and truth of the Gospel which gives joy and hope to life.

Mass times and intentions

at St Bernadette		at St Mary
4 PM <i>for the people of the parish</i>	Saturday, Nov 26	
	Sunday, Nov 27	8:30 AM <i>for the people of the parish</i>
11 AM <i>for the people of the parish</i>	Sunday, Nov 27	
8:20 AM <i>Tommy Hartung</i>	Monday, Nov 28	
	Tuesday, Nov 29	8:20 AM <i>Frances Labrasca</i>
8:20 AM <i>Chuck Beiter</i>	Wednesday, Nov 30	
6 PM <i>Edith & Lee Guinan</i>	Thursday, Dec 1	
8:20 AM <i>Pete Konkler</i>	Friday, Dec 2	
9 AM <i>Elizabeth Arter</i>	Saturday, Dec 3	
4 PM <i>for the people of the parish</i>	Saturday, Dec 3	
	Sunday, Dec 4	8:30 AM <i>for the people of the parish</i>
11 AM <i>for the people of the parish</i>	Sunday, Dec 4	

in our parishes

rite of acceptance

The Rite of Acceptance into the **Order of Catechumens** is the first of the “threshold rites” of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), and the first public ritual. In the Rite of Acceptance, **a change of identity** takes place: those previously known as **inquirers become catechumens**. They are **officially welcomed** by the Church as disciples, members (albeit not yet full members) of the household of faith. The text calls this rite “the first consecration by Christ as God’s own.” On Sunday, Dec 4, at both of our parishes, we will celebrate the Rite of Acceptance as our inquirers stand among our parish communities and state their desire to become baptized members of the Catholic Church. **Ralph Mohler** and his son **Bryant** at Mass at what is becoming their parish, Bremen St Mary, and **Jennifer Palmer** at Mass at her new parish, St Bernadette. There they will be presented by their sponsors and affirmed by our parish assemblies as they become catechumens. They will receive the sign of the cross and be assured of our prayers as they proceed in the RCIA to “learn to know [Christ] and follow him” and to prepare for the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

we counted in october

Here are the results from the October Mass counts for both parishes.

At **St Bernadette**, an average of 187 persons attended the 4 PM Vigil Mass and an average of 195 attended the 11 AM Sunday Mass for an average total attendance of **382**. This was an increase from the 2015 average of 348, although still a decrease from the 2014 average of 437. Overall, the 4 PM Mass attendance has remained relatively steady, with attendance at the 11 AM Mass showing more fluctuation.

At **St Mary**, an average of 105 persons attended the 8:30 AM Sunday Mass. This was a slight decrease from the 2015 average of 115 and the 2014 average of 117.

In our attempt to update the parish census, we can report that as of this week,

- at St Bernadette Parish, 190 households (of 452 registered), or 42%, have responded;
- at St Mary Parish, 60 households (of 130 registered), or 46%, have responded.

That helps. And we are grateful for those who have cooperated. We still have blank registration forms which the rest of the parishes can use.

What does it all mean? It means our numbers aren’t what they ought to be, but we have many people of robust faith and better means of communication than we have had. Let’s keep growing.

red cross blood drive

The **next St Bernadette blood drive** will be Saturday, Dec 3, from 9 AM-2 PM in the parish hall. This is a great way to support our community blood needs. To **make an appointment** to donate, go to www.redcrossblood.org or call Joyce Guenther at (740) 974-5040. As always there will be lunch, cupcakes, and crafts for children.

baptism class

To have a child baptized, you must register and attend a class as a couple (unless attendance just isn’t possible, in which case some discussion with Kathy Kehnast will be necessary). Sessions are held quarterly for both parishes. The next session will be Wednesday, Nov 30. Take the class before your child is born. If you are expecting, call Kathy to register for the class.

youth choir

The **Saint Cecilia Society** (St Bernadette’s parish youth choir) meets on Sundays at 6 PM in the church. All parish students in grades 2-8 (public, parochial, or home school) are invited. SCS members in grades 4-8 are also invited to be members of the Handbell Ensemble, which meets on Sunday evenings at 7 PM, right after the full SCS gathering. **Mrs Latorre can answer questions** and provide registration materials after Mass, or you may call or text her at (740) 243-1872.

adult choir

St Augustine once said, “**He who sings, prays twice.**” The St Bernadette adult choir has resumed practicing on Wednesdays at 7 PM in the church. Our adult choir is both a vocal ensemble devoted to **making beautiful music for the Lord** and a small faith family within our parish. We love to welcome new members into this family. Membership in the choir is an opportunity to be involved in the parish and grow in your faith. Contact Liz Latorre at (740) 243-1872 if you have questions.

psr (aka parish school of religion)

PSR has begun but it is not too late to enroll students. Remember: Catholic parents have a **solemn moral duty** to see that their children are **properly and completely instructed in the Catholic Faith**. And they have a duty to see that their children attend every week (barring health or weather deterrents). And children will find **getting to know Jesus and his Church is an irreplaceable and joy-filled part of their upbringing**.

advent family fun day

Begin the Advent Season with an Advent Family Fun Day today, Sunday, Nov 27, from 12-2 PM in the St Bernadette parish hall. There will be a **pancake breakfast** fundraiser for **youth attending Catholic Youth Summer Camp**, seasonal crafts, cookie making, as well as an opportunity to purchase Advent Wreaths and seasonal books. If anyone with a child attending CSYC this summer would like to help raise funds to offset the cost, please contact Kara . tencza @ gmail . com.

christmas baskets at bremen

The Bremen Community Food Pantry is in need of **turkeys and cookies for Christmas** baskets for families. Drop off ...

- **cookies** on Thursday, Dec 15, between noon and 6 PM and
- **turkeys** on Saturday, Dec 17, at 8 AM at the Calvary United Methodist Church.
- Bring **monetary donations** or **nonperishable food** items to Bremen St Mary Church.
- To make **other arrangements**, or if you can donate a turkey for the baskets, call Mary Shumaker at (740) 569-4796.

If you would like the gift of a Christmas Basket, sign up at the **Next to New Sale** at the Bremen United Methodist Church on Friday, Dec 2, from 9 AM to 5 PM or Saturday, Dec 3, between 9 AM and noon. Baskets will be distributed on Saturday, Dec 17.

parish contributions

Due to the early Thanksgiving day bulletin deadline, the **St Bernadette** and **St Mary offertory collections** for Nov 20 will be reported in next week’s bulletin.

advent drive for st vincent de paul

The Lancaster St Vincent de Paul Society tells us that their biggest need these days is for non-perishable foods, paper products (kleenex, paper towels, toilet paper), personal hygiene products (deodorant, soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes), and laundry products including detergent. So that’s what they ask us to provide. Don’t worry about too much of any of these items. There won’t be too much, for the Society will share surplus items with the St Francis Center in McArthur. This drive will last **through the four Sundays of Advent**. Our

drop off point will be in the vestibule between the school entrance and the church.

friends forever

The next Friends Forever gathering happens on Thursday, Dec 15, at noon at St Bernadette. The Advent Pot Luck features speaker Jane Acri from the Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging. Call Ann Essman at (740) 654-1893 for details.

campaign for human development

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development is dedicated to breaking the cycle of poverty by funding **community programs that encourage independence**. Your generous donations last week will give those in poverty the support they need to make lasting changes. We can make a difference in families and communities across the country. Thank you to St Bernadette and St Mary parishioners for your help. Donation amounts will be reported in next week’s bulletin.

in the diocese of columbus

catholic youth summer camp

Catholic Youth Summer Camp is Ohio’s one week-long, residential high adventure camp for students entering grades 6-12. Activities typically include jet skis, water tubing, paintball, blobbing, high ropes, archery tag, zip lining, rock climbing, giant swing, and mountain boarding. CYSC offers a **truly Catholic and safe environment with daily catechesis that awakens faith and builds missionary disciples**. A week at camp includes daily Mass, adoration, reconciliation, small group conversations, worship, service and authentic community. This is especially valuable for young people who are not now receiving other catechesis as well as to reinforce catechesis for those who are. Go to www.cysc.com for information and to register for 2017 dates: high school sessions run the weeks of June 11, 18, 25, and July 2; middle school sessions run the weeks of July 9, 16, 23, and 30. Registration is open now.

happily ever after ... despite the rough spots

Come to a Marriage Encounter weekend and learn ways to use your marriage’s ups and downs to deepen your love for each other and for God. Why not **try a Worldwide Marriage Encounter weekend**? The next weekend in central Ohio is Feb 17-19. For information or to register, contact Paul or Marilou Clouse at (614) 834-6880 or visit www.wmecolumbus.org.

advent morning of reflection

Do you want to keep the hustle and bustle at a distance during the holidays? Take some time to reflect, pray and share during the season of Advent with an Advent Morning of Reflections hosted by the Sts Peter and Paul Retreat Center on Saturday, Dec 10, from 9 AM-noon. Led by Sr Louis Mary Passeri, the theme is “**Here I Am**”: God is always near us waiting to be found. We are called to deepen our awareness of God’s presence and desire to share our lives more intimately. The day will consist of prayer, presentations, silence and opportunity to share reflections. The cost is \$20 per person and includes continental breakfast. Reservations are made by emailing info@stpeterandpaulretreatcenter.org or by calling (740) 928-4246.

the gift of a retreat

Are you looking for a gift that is one size fits all? Why not give the gift of a stay at the Sts Peter and Paul Retreat Center? Their gift certificates are perfect for holiday gifts, thank you presents, anniversary presents or employee appreciation. Choose either a flat dollar amount or pick specific rooms, meals, and number of nights for a gift as tailored as you like. Gift certificates available by email at info @ stspeterandpaulretreatcenter . org or by calling (740) 928-4246.

sts peter & paul retreat center needs help

Have you or a member of your family ever participated in a group or personal retreat at the Sts Peter and Paul Retreat Center? If you have, the experience was spiritually uplifting and rejuvenating for your soul. They ask for our prayerful consideration and our continued support of the Sts Peter and Paul Retreat Center. They need assistance through our tax deductible donations that will help **update and improve their facility**. They will continue to operate the Retreat Center in a frugal manner so that more retreatants will be able to enjoy the peace, tranquility and spirituality that Sts Peter and Paul Retreat Center offers. The needed updates and required improvements to enhance current and future retreatant experiences include:

- energy efficient boiler system (replacing the unit from 1955)
- wifi accessibility
- refrigerated storage unit (compressors and condensers)
- air conditioning the chapel and north hall.

Mail your tax deductible donation to: Sts Peter and Paul Retreat Center, 2734 Seminary Road, Newark, OH 43056.

catholic men’s luncheon club

The next Catholic Men’s Luncheon Club will feature a talk by Father Daniel Swartz, **one of the youngest and newest priests of our diocese**. Father Swartz’ talk will describe his path to the priesthood. It happens Friday, Dec 2, at St Patrick Church in downtown Columbus. Holy Mass begins at 11:45 AM followed by lunch and Father Swartz’s talk until 1 PM. No reservations are necessary. \$10 covers the lunch and meeting. Bring a friend. For information on Catholic Men’s Luncheons, visit [www . ColumbusCatholicMen . com](http://www.ColumbusCatholicMen.com) or contact Tim Merkle, CMLC President at [htm @ ejhlaw . com](mailto:htm@ejhlaw.com).

catholic record society

The Catholic Record Society will have a Fall quarterly meeting at 2 PM on Sunday, Dec 4, at St Andrew Church in Upper Arlington. The speaker will be author, historian and longtime Catholic Record Society member, Ann N Hansen. Her topic will be **A Long Road to the Church**, highlighting her travels in 63 countries, with emphasis on certain religious structures and their architecture, including the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in Norfolk, England. Following the presentation there will be a reception and a business meeting of the Catholic Record Society, featuring a silent auction of surplus Society materials. **All are welcome**. For information contact Chairman Mike Finn at [fcoolavin @ aol . com](mailto:fcoolavin@aol.com) or (614) 268-4166.

in the deanery

advent and penance

It is the season to ... what? Shop? Decorate? Send cards? Give gifts? Go to parties? Do we do these things in honor of Jesus? Well, actually it is **the season to prepare the way of the Lord**. Those other activities may help us prepare the way of the Lord. Or they may not. They are not the main preparation. Turning our hearts to him is. Going to Confession is **how Catholics do that**.

We have Confession every Thursday at 5:30 at St Bernadette and every Saturday at 3 at St Bernadette and at 8 AM on Sunday at St Mary. That’s all year round because it is an all-year-round sacrament. To teach this lesson, we are trying to increase the frequency of Penance Services at St Bernadette School.

And during Advent, we will have **communal Penance services** with individual confessions (and extra priests to help make that work!) at each of the parishes and schools in our deanery.

The Sacrament of Penance is very much a part of Catholic life. But it is the easiest part to drift away from. The Church reminds us that we need to confess our sins, at the very least, once a year. We need it, even if we haven’t any very serious sins. Saint John reminds us bluntly that

“If we say, ‘**We are without sin,**’ we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing.” *1 John 1:8-9*

If you have been away for a while, it is time to come back.

Decide which service or which Confession time you will attend this Advent. So you can prepare the way of the Lord!

in the parishes

Sugar Grove St. Joseph	Monday	Dec 5	7 PM
St. Bernadette	Sunday	Dec 11	3 PM
Logan St. John	Monday	Dec 12	7 PM
St. Mark	Tuesday	Dec 13	7 PM
Lancaster St. Mary	Thursday	Dec 15	7 PM
Bremen St. Mary	Sunday	Dec 18	3 PM

in the schools

St. Mary School	Wednesday	Nov 30	9 AM
Fisher Catholic High School	Thursday	Dec 1	1 PM
Logan St John School	Tuesday	Dec 6	10:30 AM
St. Bernadette School	Thursday	Dec 15	8:30 AM

prison christmas party

On Saturday, Dec 3, Lancaster area churches will sponsor **the “Wings” Christmas party** at the Southeastern Correctional Institute for the inmates and their families. Fifty volunteers are needed that day, from 10 AM - 4 PM. Sugar cookies should be delivered to the First Presbyterian Church on Wednesday, Nov 30. For information or to volunteer, call Jayne Brook at (740) 654-7822.

in the media

christmas in the vatican

Enrich your faith this **Advent and Christmas with special programming throughout the season** on EWTN. Attend Mass in Vatican City with Pope Francis, enjoy concerts from Europe and travel to the sacred sites of the Holy Land.

Receive EWTN's *National Catholic Register*. The Register is the premier American Catholic newspaper. It keeps you informed on everything happening in the Church and in the world — all through a faithful Catholic lens. Call 1 (800) 421-3230, or click [here](#). This is not a paid ad. Just a very good idea for people who care about the truth of our Faith.

trial subscription to the register

ministers at Mass at st bernadette						
			lector	servers	extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion	
Saturday, Nov 26	4 PM	Brad Rider	Gus & Olivia Spiegel, Cady Tipple	Marguerite Grimm Joyce Guenther	Lee Guinan Kathy Kehnast	Sandy Landefeld Denise McGuire
Sunday, Nov 27	11 AM	David Shonk	Logan & Tori Loy, Addy Myers	Pat Dreyer Larry Sanford	Anna Sevigny Jim & Rita Merk	Becky Wickham
Monday, Nov 28	8:20 AM	Mary J Vajen	Mitchell Ortiz, Sarah Woo	Pat Dreyer	Kathy Kehnast	
Wednesday Nov 30	8:20 AM	Bob Christy	Brianna Hilyard, Lexi Utz	Mary Guinan	Mary Jane Vajen	
Thursday, Dec 1	6 PM	Kathy Kehnast	Becca Fuller, Joey Mannella	Lee Guinan	Paul Lonergan	
Friday, Dec 2	8:20 AM	Jim Merk	Jack Gentile, Gunner Robertson	Jim & Rita Merk		
Saturday, Dec 3	9 AM	Kara Tencza	Jack Tencza	Jim & Rita Merk		
Saturday, Dec 3	4 PM	Teresa Scarpitti	Mallory, Mason & McKenzie Ortiz	Rosalie DeFillippo Brad Rider	Craig Shaw Jim & Becky Kuhn	Mickey Steyaert
Sunday, Dec 4	11 AM	Scott Wood	Brooke, Bryson & Zachary Vogel	Terry Carpenter Ben Peters	Jean Robertson John & Teresa Hartig	Amy Woo

ministers at Mass at bremen st mary						
		lector	servers	extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion	gifts	sacristan / usher
Sunday, Nov 27	8:30 AM	Jeanne Schmelzer	Abby Skinner Nicole Terry	Dismas Schmelzer, Damian & Deborah Schmelzer	Maurice Schmelzer family	Damian Schmelzer
Sunday, Dec 4	8:30 AM	Barb Van Fossen-Cook	Caden Fyffe Cody Fyffe	Neil Boch, Wyatt Borah, Barb VanFossen-Cook	Nick Schmelzer family	Jim Schmelzer

the Church's plan for reading God's word this week										
Sat	Nov 26	First Sunday of Advent	Isaiah	2:1-5	Romans	13:11-14	Psalm	122	Matt	24:37-44
Sun	Nov 27									
Mon	Nov 28	Advent Weekday	Isaiah	4:2-6			Psalm	122	Matt	8:5-11
Tues	Nov 29	Advent Weekday	Isaiah	11:1-10			Psalm	72	Luke	10:21-24
Weds	Nov 30	St Andrew	Romans	10:9-18			Psalm	19	Matt	4:18-22
Thurs	Dec 1	Advent Weekday	Isaiah	26:1-6			Psalm	118	Matt	7:21-27
Fri	Dec 2	Advent Weekday	Isaiah	29:17-24			Psalm	27	Matt	9:27-31
Sat	Dec 3	St Francis Xavier	Isaiah	30:19-26			Psalm	147	Matt	9:35-10:8
Sun	Dec 4	Second Sunday of Advent	Isaiah	11:1-10	Romans	15:4-9	Psalm	72	Matt	3:1-12

confessions & weekday Mass nearby These times sometimes change, though, so be sure to call ahead!									
Bremen	St Mary	8 AM Sunday	8:20 AM	8:20 AM	8:20 AM	6 PM	8:20 AM	1st Sat @ 9 AM	
Lancaster	St Bernadette	5:30 PM Thurs, 3 PM Sat; 8:30 AM on 1st Sat	8:20 AM		8:20 AM	6 PM	8:20 AM		
	parish	confessions	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	
Lancaster	St Mary	4 PM Saturday	7 AM	9 AM	7 AM	9 AM			
Lancaster	St Mark	5:30 PM Saturday	8 AM	8 AM	6 PM	8 AM	8 AM		
Sugar Grove	St Joseph	½ hour before Mass	8 AM	NOON	8 AM	NOON	8 AM		
Circleville	St Joseph	4 PM Saturday	9 AM	7 PM	9 AM		9 AM	10 AM	
Logan	St John	4 PM Saturday	8 AM	8 AM	9 AM		8 AM	9 AM	

Stay awake!

Staying awake—vigilant, watchful—is the special command and challenge of the Lord in today’s Gospel reading. This is the attitude of the season of Advent which begins today.

I don’t suppose we use the word “**vigilant**” very often, but it is an attitude that is especially helpful for us Christians. It is “keeping an eye out,” but doing so quietly. **There is a patience in being vigilant, but not a passivity.** When we are vigilant we are usually holding still. We have our eyes wide open, our mouths closed.

We use the word vigil or vigilant in several ways. For instance we speak of the vigilance of parents who carefully watch to see whether their kids show any signs of substance abuse or harmful use of the internet. We speak of the day that comes before a holiday as its “vigil.” In cowboy films we used to hear of the citizens who took the law into their own hands as “vigilantes.” On the evening before a funeral Mass we speak of the closing prayers at the funeral home as the “vigil service.” In the monastery, we called the very beautiful, but not always popular, time at 3:15 in the morning, when we got up for quiet praying of the Psalms and meditative Scripture reading, the “Office of Vigils.”

Advent is the season of keeping watch. We are awaiting, patiently, but not passively, the coming of the Lord. Not just awaiting the coming of his birthday celebration. **The birthday is there to remind us of the expectancy.**

“**Expectancy**”—there is another one of those words that is full of meaning. The common expression is “pregnant with meaning.” The way little children look to Christmas and its gift giving presents us with one aspect of that eager expectancy. But parents should be vigilant **that the eagerness doesn’t fall into a greediness** or a materialism that would be the **opposite of the real spirit of Advent or of Christmas.**

I have often thought that this season of Advent is **the most Catholic time of the year** in our country. In Protestant churches and households where Catholic practices are not followed, where religious statues are rather rare, where images of Jesus’ mother Mary are otherwise absent, suddenly, and for one month only, there are often manger scenes. In a country where there is a sometimes fanatical and distorted “wall of separation” between church and state (which would undoubtedly have baffled our Founding Fathers!) for one month only there is an annual Christmas postage stamp showing Mary holding Jesus in her arms or receiving a message from the Archangel Gabriel (see the painting on the front cover). Sometimes we see manger scenes on the lawns of post offices or city halls (in spite of threats of litigation by the bigoted anti-religion movement). The prominence of Mary, whom Catholics keep in the forefront year ’round, in a wider range of places and expressions during December year after year is, well, breath-taking. And very reassuring.

A delightful spur to meditation during Advent for even the very moderately computer literate, like myself, can be found in **searching “Annunciation” on “Google Images.”** And there she is: Mary encountering the heavenly messenger who tells her that she is to be the mother of her Lord. There are an amazing number of images. And so many of them are so beautiful. Most of them come from the era when Christian art comprised the lion’s share of painting (the Middle Ages) or countries where that predominance lasted longer (in Catholic countries like Italy, France, Spain, Bavaria, the Rhineland). They generally follow the same general outlines, but present us with often unique insights into the wonder of this announcement which we read about in the Gospel according to Saint Luke.

By the way, starting today the whole Catholic Church—and a surprising number of Protestant denominations—begin **the triennial year of Matthew.** His is the gospel we will be reading from nearly every Sunday. It is not at all hard for a serious follower of Jesus to read that Gospel—the whole thing!—during this year. Or even this afternoon. If you haven’t read a gospel cover to cover in a while (ever?) you can do it in a couple of hours. And this one is a good one to start with.

Matthew has a special knack for making the connections between the story of Jesus and the Old Testament story which Jesus fulfills. But you don’t have to be a Jew to appreciate this Gospel. Matthew often tells us that “**This happened to fulfill what was written in the Book of the Prophet ...**” This is especially prominent in Matthew’s first two chapters, which along with Luke’s first two chapters, is our only source for **the stories around the annunciation, birth, and childhood of Jesus.** But the two are very different. Whereas Luke tells this story from the perspective of Our Lady, Matthew focuses on **the experience of Joseph.** Matthew tells us of the annunciation to Joseph, not that of John the Baptist to Zechariah or of Jesus to Mary. Matthew doesn’t have the story of the visitation. He passes over the journey to Bethlehem and the angelic announcement. Instead he simply mentions the birth of Jesus before he tells us of the Magi, Herod’s brutal jealousy, and the flight into Egypt. Matthew makes us think of that other Joseph who led his people into Egypt as a means of deliverance and of that other departure from Egypt to come to the Promised Land. For Matthew Jesus is **the new Moses,** a point which he takes up again when he shows Jesus going up another mountain to deliver a new law when he preaches the **Sermon on the Mount** in chapters 5-7. When we read Matthew’s gospel attentively, we can discover a whole new way of looking at the wonderful stories of the Old Testament. Jesus fulfills the expectation of Israel! Start reading him today.

— *Father Kessler*

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