

Second Sunday of Advent

December 10, 2017

Mass Intentions

Saturday, December 16th

5 P.M. – Sweet Home – Joe, Sr., Albina,
Angeline & Joe Smirak, Jr.

Sunday, December 17th

7 A.M. – Sweet Home – Rose Pekar,
James Konvicka, Thomas Kocian
9 A.M. – Koerth – Benita DeBord

Sanctuary Candle Intention

The Sanctuary Candle will burn this week for those suffering with terminal illness.

This Sunday's Holy Scriptures

Is 40:1-5, 9-11; 2 Pt 3:8-14; Mk 1:1-8

Your Gift to God: December 3rd

Sweet Home	\$1,413
Online Giving	\$320
Building Fund	\$20
DSA	\$15
Koerth	\$639
Building Fund	\$921
DSA	\$62

May God reward your generosity!

Celebrate the Lord's Abundant Mercy

Each Saturday the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance/Confession) is available from 4:00 P.M. to 4:40 P.M. in the Sweet Home confessional.

Special Collection

A special collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious will be taken up at all Masses this weekend, December 9-10.

*"Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths."*

Advent Penance Services

All services begin at 5:30 P.M.

Monday, December 11 – Shiner

Tuesday, December 12 - Moulton

Thursday, December 14 – Yoakum

Friday, December 15 - Hallettsville

The Importance of Reconciliation

Each year in preparation for the Feast of Christmas there are a week of Penance Services in our area. It's a good practice as we gear up for the holy day celebrations to pause and seek out peace and forgiveness—to be reconciled—with our loving Father and in doing so—with the Church. To experience the sure knowledge of being forgiven, of being so loved that the Father simply awaits our coming back to Him with our weaknesses, faults and sins—so he can readily forgive us. His Son, whose Second Coming we hope for, and whose birth we are preparing to remember and celebrate, provides us with this wonderful, grace filled Sacrament. Plan ahead...figure out which scheduled service "fits" with your family's plans...and be reconciled!

Feast of Christmas Mass Schedule

Sweet Home - December 24th – 5:00 P.M.
10:00 P.M.

Koerth - December 25th – 9:00 A.M.



FYI: Parish Office Schedule

The Parish Office will close at 12-noon on Friday, December 22nd and re-open at 8:00 A.M. Tuesday, January 2nd. **Deadline for the December 24th and December 31st bulletins is noon Wednesday, December 20th.**

Christmas Flowers

Extra envelopes for the Christmas Flower donations may be found in the Church entrances. Donors and their listed memorials will be in the bulletin after Christmas. This applies to Queen of Peace and St. John the Baptist.

Religious Goods

The St. Joseph Pastoral Center has various types of religious goods available for sale in the lobby. There are religious cards, crucifixes, rosaries, Bibles, prayer books (English and Spanish), Advent wreaths, religious Christmas ornaments, statues, cemetery candleholders, etc....just the beginning of the list. All are available during office hours. It is never too early to start your Christmas shopping!

Cemetery Inquiries

Anyone with questions regarding the Catholic Cemeteries should contact the local representatives for the Cemeteries.

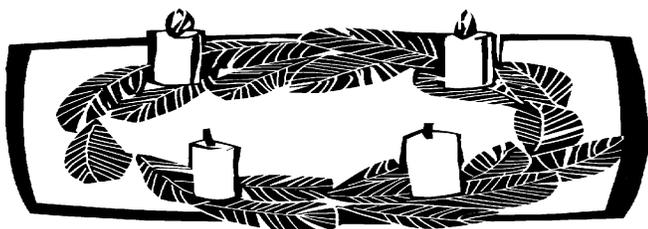
Queen of Peace:

Harvey Matusek & J. O. Hermes

St. John the Baptist:

Gene Velek & Jerry/Joyce Kurtz

They can provide the needed information and help with locating available plots. They will also provide the needed details to complete a purchase/reservation and receive a deed for record purposes.



Diocese of Victoria 30th Annual Catholic Conference

Saturday, January 27, 2018
Holy Family Church, Wharton

The seven principles of **Catholic Social Teaching** will be presented by 22 speakers in 32 workshops. The titles, descriptions and presenter vitae can be seen on the diocesan website.

Also see the newly revised flyer and registration form, mailed in mid-October, for titles and names of speakers. If you did not receive one, call us at (361) 573-0828 ext. 2224, 2225, or 2227.

On line registration is now open. Go to the Diocesan website www.victoriadiocese.org to register.

Why you need to pay attention to your Nativity scene

Cerith Gardiner

Do you know what your creche means?

Often neglected in the media, the Nativity scene holds far more importance than the popular Christmas tree. Yet do you know the rich meaning behind both of these cherished Christmas symbols? Here's a brief explanation with a few reasons why you need to pay extra attention to your creche this year:

The symbolism of the tree

Today's beautifully decorated Christmas trees are little like the first trees used by Christians to celebrate Christ's birth all those centuries ago. Back in the 8th century, during his missionary in Germany, St. Boniface chopped down a sturdy oak tree, much to the amazement of the Druids who used it as a symbol of worship. Turning to a small fir tree, St. Boniface referred to it as the "tree of the Christ-child," with its everlasting pine needles; a sign of eternal life. The triangular shape also helped to symbolize the Holy Trinity, and its green branches pointed upward to heaven. He instructed the Germans to "gather about it ... in your own homes; there it will shelter no deeds of blood, but loving gifts and rites of kindness."

As Christmas trees became popular, there was concern about the pagan character of its origin, but the symbolic meaning behind the tree demonstrated its deep roots in the Christian faith. In fact, the symbolism of the tree is very rich in our tradition: our forebearers were directed

by God not to eat the fruits of one of the trees of Eden; Christ paid the highest price of our redemption crucified on a tree trunk; the green branches and the lights that decorate the Christmas tree evoke Christ as the Eternal Light that comes to a world enveloped in darkness.

Despite the strong commercial nuances over the last century, diminishing its Christian significance for many, the Christmas tree remains a valid symbol of the coming of Christ into the world. So while decorating the tree, why not use it as a time to explain to your children the story of one of the greatest missionaries, St. Boniface, and how the humble fir came to represent such an important event?

The history of the Nativity scene

However, even with this contextual validation, the Christmas tree is by no means the main visual symbol of the birth of Jesus. This is when we need to turn to another saint, the beloved St. Francis of Assisi, who while traveling in Greccio, Italy back in 1223, created the first crib in history when trying to solve the problem of overcrowding in a church at Midnight Mass.

Finding a little niche in a rock, St. Francis set about making an altar. He gained permission from the pontiff to create a *living* crib, with the village inhabitants representing the Child Jesus in the manger, Our Lady, St. Joseph, the Magi, the shepherds, and the angels. The animals were also real: the ox, the donkey, and the sheep. St. Bonaventure describes St. Francis at the scene: “The man of God [St. Francis] stood before the manger, full of devotion and piety, bathed in tears and radiant with joy.” News of the crib soon spread, turning into the beautiful Christmas custom it has become today, with carved cribs becoming popular in the churches around the 16th century, thanks to the evangelizing work of the Jesuit priests.

When building the creche, there are lots of meanings and traditions to stick to at various stages. Here are some for you to add to your own family tradition:

How to prepare the crib in meaningful stages

- First, organize the general scene, placing the animals, the shepherds, the manger – but hold off adding the main characters of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the angels, the star, and the three kings.
- Some families wait until the afternoon of December 24 to place the crib and the figurines of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, but still refrain from adding Infant Jesus – sometimes difficult with impatient kids!
- Disclosure: the manger remains empty until midnight, when, symbolizing the Birth of the Son of God, the image of the Child is finally placed there!

- Along with baby Jesus, the angels are also placed, who evoke the song “Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men of good will,” mentioned in the Scriptures.
- Together with the angels, add the star that guided the three kings from the East to Bethlehem to worship the Savior, on top of the crib. The magi, popularly referred to as Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, represent all the peoples of the earth and often come with their trusty exotic rides: camels or even elephants.
- There are those who begin to position the three kings in the crib only from the 25th onward: initially they are placed far from the manger, still traveling, and are approached a little more each day until they arrive on the feast of the Epiphany, on January 6.

A true domestic catechism

However, the crib is not a simple adornment: it is a beautiful visual form of expressing our faith and our prayer, during the waiting and celebration for the arrival of the Savior. This tradition involves a process, a growth, and an exciting time for the family in preparation of the most beautiful story of all time. It is a true domestic catechism, especially for children!

Resistance to forced secularization

With the increase in forced secularization, which has completely distorted the meaning of the Christmas tree (and of Christmas itself), it is far more difficult to erase the explicit symbolism that is present in the Nativity scene, since the reference to the Savior is blatant and obvious. Perhaps this is why in modern times the crib has simply been ignored, to the extent of gradually being forgotten — in a few cases, it is treated as “tacky” or in “bad taste”... or worse: there are cases in today’s Western world where local councils have even banned the crib in areas visible to the public, in order not to “offend” the followers of other religions. It would be a pity that Catholic families also find themselves “forgetting” the crib and its most wonderful symbolism of the beginning of Christ’s life on Earth.

So get into the attic, dust off your manger, and make room in your house for the crib this year, with a thought to St. Francis of Assisi.



