



The First Order

St. Stephen's Parish

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JANUARY 2017

Joyful New Year!

When I served a parish in New Hampshire, my bishop would come for his visitation, and always worked into his sermon something like this:

When I visit a parish, I frequently hear that people are happy with this or not happy with that.... The clergy will tell me that they are afraid of making a decision that will make some folks unhappy.... Well, we are not in the business of "happiness." We are happy about trivial things~ the weather, what's for dinner, which parking space we got, whether someone complimented our haircut.... Hundreds of little things a day have the ability to make you feel momentarily happy or unhappy. When I visit a parish, I want to know if there is Joy there.

Joy has deep roots, and does not waver like Happiness. Feeling connected to something bigger and deeper than ourselves brings Joy. Making a real difference in the life of another brings Joy. Knowing that your life and your work matter brings Joy. From moment to moment, none of us are "happy" all the time, but we can still lead lives that are filled with Joy.

In these dark, cold, winter months, we greet a new year as humans have done before us: gathering together to sing, to light candles, to marvel first at the baby in the stable, and then at the Magi from distant

lands, and finally at the child growing strong and wise.

January is an incubator month, a time to plan ahead how we wish to spend our time in this year ahead. Maybe making resolutions isn't our "way," but we still can ponder what about the past year held meaning for us, and aim to do more of those things in the year ahead.

I wish for you not the fleeting happiness of non-essential things in 2017, but rather the Joy of knowing that your life is important, that you are loved, that your presence is valued, that your unique gifts bless your church and this community in ways that nobody else's ever will.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things... And the God of peace will be with you. ~~~Philippians 4:8-9

love,
Cricket+

Reflections

Christmas and Epiphany: Making God Visible for Children

Craig Reynolds, Church School Director

"Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."
– Matthew 1:23

"Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you."
– Isaiah 60:1

It's January. Christmas Day has come – and gone. The Christmas season lingers. (Remember, there are twelve days of Christmas!) Epiphany awaits. And it's 2017. Have you seen God yet?

If it's hard for adults to "see" God in the day-to-day, imagine the challenge that children face. To help, we often offer metaphors. (God is like the wind – we don't see the wind either, but we feel its effect.) And we offer well-intentioned guidance. (When we pray or meditate, it's easier to feel God in our hearts.) But are there other things – more tangible things – we can do to help make God visible for kids?

Here are a few thoughts:

- **Prayer Beads/Meditation Stones:** Touching and holding something can have a calming, cen-

tering effect. It can help us connect with something deeper within and beyond ourselves.

- **Candles:** Candlelight, particularly when viewed in ambient darkness, can be quite soothing. Candlelight can also help focus our attention. (Candles should obviously be used only with adult supervision. Electric candles can often achieve many of the same desirable effects.)
- **A Dedicated Holy Space:** Having a place at home set aside for prayer, quiet time, and contemplation can encourage children (and adults!) to step out of their daily routines for a much-needed break. (This might also be a place for prayer beads, candles, icons, pictures of loved ones, etc.)
- **Music/Chanting:** Listening to music – and (especially) making music – stimulates different parts of our brains than most day-to-day activities. This can help us disconnect from the noise of the day and "tune in" to God.
- **Sacred Art/Icons:** Viewing sacred art – like icons – can help us engage our interior world in a different way and at a different level. What's even more engaging? *Making* art!
- **Community:** It may be a bit of a cliché, but it's still a universal truth – we meet God in our encounters with others. My personal feeling is that God can become particularly visible when we encounter folks who aren't in our usual circles.
- **Service:** When children are offered opportunities to serve others, their sense of confidence grows, as does their sense of compassion, and ability to empathize with others.

How might your family make God visible this month?



Christmas/Epiphany Pageant

Join us for the Christmas/Epiphany Pageant this year, on **January 8th**, at the **10:00 a.m. service!** Men, women, and children – **all** are welcome! No Audition necessary. No lines to memorize. And... no rehearsal! Please come early to church (9:00 to 9:15 a.m.) on the 8th, for your costume and role assignment.



from Joseph

This past Advent (yes, it is already in the past!) our adult forum centered on poetry. Some people loved poetry and wanted to dive deep into them, and others were not fans of poetry but there to show support (and maybe find a poem they could like). I am grateful for the leadership and teaching of Nancy Travis in selecting some wonderful challenging poems both contemporary and older to share with us.

The literary route to the Gospel is a time-honored part of the Episcopal / Anglican tradition. So many of our most brilliant thinkers were poets or storytellers: Dorothy Sayers, CS Lewis, John Donne, TS Eliot, Madeleine L'Engle, Thomas Traherne, Charles Wesley (hymns are also poems!) and more.

Stories and poems help us to use our imaginations to dive into the Gospel truth in a new way, and to incorporate our own narrative into the Gospel story. A wonderful new book by Forward Movement, *The Path*, endeavors to tell the Gospel story (using the words of the Bible translation we use on Sunday) in a clear way, so you might consider that for the new year to help you get a deeper sense of the story (and stories within a story) of the Bible. When we know the Bible better, we suddenly might understand how God is working in our own lives in a more profound way.

It's one of the small things Angie Moon and I have been trying to do with the youth of the parish when we gather: we ask them to tell us their stories and to reflect on them. Tell us what is going on in your lives and what you see is happening. What does it all mean? Where do you see God now, and where are you being guided? It's a spiritual discipline that every person must engage in throughout their lives.

In this new year, try to take some time to reflect on your days and look for God. Read Scripture to help you see God's work in your life and in the world better, and share the story with others in the world. The world longs to know God more deeply.

January

Happy Birthday:

- 2 David Aldrich, Cassidy Devitt
- 3 Michael Connors, Kenneth Eddy
- 4 Andrea Appleton (a milestone!), Nancy Lamoureaux
- 7 Reilly Cachat, Anthony Croce
- 8 Gayle Casassa
- 9 Heather DiGrigoli, Gwen Sears
- 10 Cathy Carchedi
- 11 John Culver, Molly Doyle, Mark Eddy
- 12 Hunter Nelson
- 17 Judith Washburn
- 19 Zachary Turner
- 20 Meghan Doane, Judith Lamont
- 21 Jasmine Hyatt, Raylene Shaw
- 22 Charlene Cassavant
- 23 Rose Bryson, Beverly Heidel
- 24 Cassidy Goodwin, Shelsie Watford
- 25 Alyvia Dowling, Soleil Laurin, Diana Macfarlane, Hanila Novak
- 26 David Nevin, Christiana Perry
- 27 Teddy Carter
- 28 Simira Hanger, Nancy Zuber
- 29 Bert Boos, Kristen Currie, Cameron Langsdale, Kaydence Shaw

Happy Anniversary:

- 3 Michelle & Marshal Kysor (2001)
- 7 Patricia & John Moynahan (1956)

St. Stephen's Parish

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Warm Heads, Warm Hearts Update

Due to the cold and snowy weather now descending on us, more supplies are needed for both our Table Guests as well as our Cathedral of the Beloved members. There is a great need and everything you give will be used.

Your handmade items or gently used winter hats, gloves, mittens and scarves are greatly appreciated; warm clothing, sweaters, jackets and coats are also welcome. We continue to need items for adult men and women only. Any children's items are appreciated as well, however, and will be donated to the Redfield House.



I wish you all the blessings of a safe, warm and blessed Christmas and New Year.

Connie Bullard,
cgbooks30@verizon.net

Eclectic Book Club

We had a wonderful meeting on December 2. Many thanks to Martie for the beautiful decorations and to the many others who helped with the clean-up. What a great crew!!

We reviewed the book, "A Man Called Ove," with much appreciation for the suggestion.

After skipping January, these are the selections for the coming months:

February: *Red Wine and War* by Kladstrup brothers; Linda and Don will host

March: *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis; Connie and Susan will be our co-hosts.

Happy New Year!
Joan Kurber

