



December 24, 2023

Written by  
THE  
FAITHFUL  
DISCIPLE

## Fourth Sunday of Advent

2 Sm 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16 | Rom 16:25-27 | Lk 1:26-38

**GROW** AS A DISCIPLE | PRAY, STUDY, ENGAGE, SERVE

“Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.” The angel Gabriel announces this in the Gospel today, and it is a phrase with which we are all familiar thanks to our recitation of the Hail Mary prayer. Although some may be comforted by such a message and its angelic messenger, it is troubling to Mary because the angel goes on to tell her she will conceive and bear the Son of God. Thinking practically, Mary is being told the impossible will happen – who wouldn’t be troubled? And yet Mary offers herself: “I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Despite her fear and trepidation, Mary went on to answer God’s call and do his will. Our Blessed Mother became a great example of fortitude at that moment, as she exemplified what it means to step outside of our own uncertainty and trust God completely. Although doing God’s will can be difficult at times, St. Paul reminds us in his Letter to the Romans that we can ask God for the strength to say “yes” in spite of our fears.

**GO** EVANGELIZE

PRAYER, INVITATION, WITNESS, ACCOMPANIMENT

Up until today, December has probably been a whirlwind. Trees and lights, ornaments, parties and presents – all these things help to kick off “the most wonderful time of year” beginning soon after Thanksgiving. Come Dec. 26, however, for many, the decorations become a nuisance and Christmas trees are out on the curb for pickup. Thank goodness for our Catholic faith because for us, Christmas is just beginning! Mary didn’t say “may it be done to me” only to forget about it the next day. No, in the coming months, the Blessed Mother nurtured the baby Jesus in her womb, anticipating the arrival of her firstborn and the Son of God. And on that blessed Christmas night, her work as the Mother of God was only just beginning. So, as we anticipate the arrival of the Christ Child, we are joyful that *our* Christmas season continues until we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord on January 8. Let us use this time to draw closer to God and make every effort in the new year to do his will.

**SING** *Angels, announce with shouts of mirth  
Christ who brings new life to earth.  
Set every peak and valley humming  
With the word, the Lord is coming.  
People, look east and sing today:  
Love, the Lord, is on the way.*

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## The Wonder of It All

In the early church, Christmas was actually not a major feast, but over the centuries it grew in importance, and Saint Francis of Assisi catapulted its popularity in 1223 by creating the first nativity scene in a cave with live animals. Christmas Midnight Mass was celebrated there and it was a huge hit with the whole town. The tradition of the Christmas crèche was born. Francis loved Christmas, considering it the “Feast of Feasts,” because God chose to take the humble form of a poor baby. Let the wonder of the Incarnation imbue your day. - *Takefiveforfaith.com*

## Quotes

*A God who became so small could only be mercy and love.*  
-Saint Thérèse of Lisieux

*Mary conceived Christ in her womb, and we bear him in our hearts.*  
-Saint Peter Damian

*It is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty founder was a child himself.*  
-Charles Dickens

## Parish Office Holiday Schedule

Ascension Office will be **closed** on:  
-Dec. 25, 26, and 29 (Monday, Tuesday, Friday)  
and will be **open** on:  
-Dec. 27 and 28 (Wednesday, Thursday).  
Merry Christmas!

## MASS INTENTIONS

Dec 23	Sat	05 pm	Maxine Stice +
Dec 24	Sun	09 am	Peter Mendonca +
		11 am	Jim Bastholm +
Dec 26	Tue	08 am	Fr. Ben Manding +
Dec 30	Sat	09 am	Louisa Whelan (L)

## WEEKLY OFFERING - DEC 17

**-\$8,081** (baskets: \$6,345; online: \$1,736). Weekly goal: \$6,500.  
-YTD: **\$145,847**. Budget: \$162,800. Shortfall: \$16,953.  
Thank you for your generous support.



*Peace of the Emmanuel  
be with you and yours  
this holy season and  
in the coming year 2024.*

Fr. Hao & Ascension Parish Staff

## An Embarrassment of Riches

Every so many years, we experience this happy collision of observances: the last Sunday of Advent blossoms into Christmas Eve in a single day. Which means next week, the Feast of the Holy Family will roll into the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God by nightfall. It's a mad scramble for presiders, preachers, choirs, and liturgists to keep up with the whole, holy mess of these occasions. Parishioners too will be obliged to untangle the remarkable Mass schedule this landslide of liturgies creates. Consider it a cheerful reminder that liturgy gathers us into mysteries that are not finite but everlasting. - *Takefiveforfaith.com*

## True Love

Dec. 26

On this second day of Christmas, consider words about true love—and Saint Stephen—from Saint Fulgentius, a North African bishop of the sixth century: “Love was Stephen’s weapon by which he gained every battle, and so won the crown signified by his name. His love of God kept him from yielding to the ferocious mob; his love for his neighbor made him pray for those who were stoning him.” Celebrate the Christmas octave with the same steadfast love the first Christian martyr showed his persecutors. - *Takefiveforfaith.com*

## Soothing the Dreadful Wait

A 6-year-old climbed into her mother’s lap the morning of Christmas Eve, and said, “Mommy, I’m afraid I’m going to die.” Coming from a child who rarely suffered even a cold, the mother was surprised. “What on earth would make you say that?” she asked.

“I don’t know. I’m just scared.” her little one said...

“Oh, Mom, please,” her unsympathetic older sister piped in. “She’s just worried she’s going to miss Christmas and opening her presents.”

A sense of dread or deep anxiety is not uncommon during a long wait, particularly when we know it is about to end: The grades are about to be posted. The lab results are about to be sent. Santa Claus is about to make his way down the chimney. The Prince of Peace is about to bring salvation to the world.

It’s a lot for our minds to process. People will advise us to pray, breathe, and think positive thoughts. Angels will tell us not to be afraid. Or, if we’re 6 years old, we may simply be rocked in our mother’s arms until the fear passes. - *Patrice J. Tuohy*

## Holy Season Mass Schedule

### 4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

-Dec. 23: 5:00 pm (Vigil Mass)  
-Dec. 24: 7:00 am, 9:00 am, 11:00 am

### CHRISTMAS EVE

-Dec. 24: 5:00 pm, 8:00 pm

### CHRISTMAS DAY

-Dec. 25: 7:00 am, 9:00 am, 11:00 am (no 5:00 pm Mass)

### HOLY FAMILY FEAST

-Dec. 30: 5:00 pm (Vigil Mass)  
-Dec. 31: 7:00 am, 9:00 am, 11:00 am, 5:00 pm

### NEW YEAR - MARY MOTHER OF GOD FEAST

-Jan. 1: 9:00 am (Mass with Rosary for Peace)