Rejoice in the Lord
Christmas is a feast of joy in heaven and Earth, page 5.

“She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21) (CNS/Bridgeman Art Library)
The Christmas season has always been known as a time for bringing people together. And the east side Indianapolis parishes of Holy Cross and St. Philip Neri have long been known for their generous outreach to people in need—especially during the holiday season.

For decades, members of Holy Cross Parish have distributed Christmas food baskets to families, while St. Philip parishioners have collected clothes and toys to make Christmas brighter for children and their parents through their “Christmas with Christ” effort.

That shared sense of generosity is one of the bonds that members of both communities have pointed to as Holy Cross Parish merged into St. Philip Neri on Nov. 30. The two parishes united through the Connected in the Spirit planning process—part of the plan for the four Indianapolis deaneries that Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin announced in May.

“We have two very dynamic, active and engaged parishes coming together,” says Father Christopher Wadelton, administrator of St. Philip Neri Parish. “Having a common outreach toward people in need will help us come together, and have an even greater sense of community on the east side of Indianapolis. I see us doing great things together.”

Members of the combined faith community saw a successful start in that direction when about 500 people—born and raised in the parish. Others have connected in the past.

“I was overwhelmed,” says Ann Litton, a member of St. Philip since the early 1970s. “We were hoping to fill the church, and we did. People were in the choir loft. The choirs of St. Philip and Holy Cross combined.”

The Mass of unity also reflected one of the gifts and the opportunities of the two parishes merging. In actuality, there are three communities that are coming together, Father Wadelton notes. There are the former members of Holy Cross, the English-speaking members of St. Philip and the Spanish-speaking members of St. Philip.

Symbolizing the desire to connect the three communities, the Dec. 7 Mass was celebrated in both English and Spanish. And one of the highlights of the Mass was a liturgical dance that the Hispanic group Efeta performed to an English-language song.

“The reception afterward was well-attended, too,” says Father Wadelton. “People mingled. There was a strong feeling of community. I heard a number of people from Efeta who were appreciative of all the planning and the hospitality.”

As the former parish council president of Holy Cross, Mike Barrett says that people in the parish “had a lot of different reactions” when the Connected in the Spirit decision was made to merge Holy Cross into St. Philip.

“There is some sorrow that it’s not Holy Cross Parish anymore. Some were born and raised in the parish. Others have come along at different points. Holy Cross was their home,” Barrett says. “But there’s also hope. And there’s relief that the community will continue as part of St. Philip Parish.”

Part of that relief came in knowing that Holy Cross Central School will continue to be open as part of the Mother Theodore Catholic Academies. Relief has also come in the decision to have the former Holy Cross Church become Holy Cross Chapel and continue as a worship site for St. Philip Neri Parish.

At 8:30 on Thursday mornings, Mass will be celebrated at the chapel for the parish community of Holy Cross Central. A Mass will also be celebrated in Holy Cross Chapel at 9 a.m. on Sundays.

“The archbishop has allowed us to continue to use the church as a worship site,” says Father Wadelton. “The chapel can also be used for weddings, funerals and baptisms as long as there is a pastoral reason.”

At the same time, St. Philip Parish will have just one parish council, one finance committee and a combined liturgy committee, among other plans to unite the communities. The two groups that represent the St. Vincent de Paul Society are working together as one. And there are plans to combine the two Christmas outreach efforts next year.

“We’re working together as we move forward as one parish,” Father Wadelton says. “My hope is that we will become one parish with two worship sites, and we’ll all be members of the same parish. I see movement in that direction already.”

Members of both communities share that hope.

“We have to continue to work together, find ways to get to know each other,” Wadelton says. “When we do, we will be a viable Church presence on the east side.”

“Parishes were really strong, and we’ll be even stronger as we come together.”

The two parishes united through the Connected in the Spirit planning process—part of the plan for the four Indianapolis deaneries that Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin announced in May. The two parishes united through the Connected in the Spirit planning process—part of the plan for the four Indianapolis deaneries that Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin announced in May. By John Shaughnessy The Christmas liturgical schedule for SS. Peter and Paul, 1347 N. Meridian St., in Indianapolis is as follows:

SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral
Dec. 24—5 p.m. vigil Mass.
Also, Midnight Mass with Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin scheduled as the principal celebrant with prelude starting at 11:40 p.m. Parking is available behind the cathedral for the 5 p.m. Mass and Midnight Mass. Parking is also available for Midnight Mass at the Catholic Center, 1400 N. Meridian St., from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.
Dec. 25—10:30 a.m. Mass. †

The Criterion and Catholic Center are closed from Dec. 24 to Jan. 4 for Christmas holiday.

This week’s issue of The Criterion, which is our annual Christmas publication, is the last issue of 2014.

The Criterion will be published again on Jan. 9, 2015, and resume its weekly schedule. The Archbishop O’Meara Catholic Center will be closed from Dec. 24 through Jan. 4 in observance of the holidays. Archdiocesan agencies will reopen at 8 a.m. on Monday, Jan. 5, 2015.

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Office of Communications
Catholic Church of St. Philip Neri Parish in Indianapolis

On the Cover Mary and the child Jesus are depicted in a 15th-century painting by Pietro di Sanlo. The feast of the Nativity of Christ, a holy day of obligation, is celebrated on Dec. 25. (ChicagobiblicalArtLibrary)
1. The work of Connected in the Spirit continues with changes to parishes in the Indianapolis deaneries.

Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin spoke before hundreds of clergy and lay Catholics on Sept. 26 at the Cathedral of St. Peter in Indianapolis in an event marking the beginning of what is termed the Archdiocese of Indianapolis planning process. The changes, which affected Indianapolis parishes, included the closing of 26 parishes, the closure of two schools, the Cross, Holy Trinity and St. Bernadette, all of which were merged with nearby parishes as of Nov. 30.

Subsequently, the changes, which were announced in such a way that they will begin—or continue—to share a priest, other staff members, program ministers and committees; still others would create partnerships to collaborate with nearby peers.

Archbishop Tobin said that the goal of the ongoing process is to help parishes “determine where God is leading the Church in central and southern Indiana, and to discuss how the Archdiocese of Indianapolis could change its structures in order to carry out its mission today and in the future.”

The decisions followed on the heels of a busy 2013, which saw changes that affected 26 of the 27 parishes in the Batesville Deanery, along with three other nearby parishes.

Additionally, several appeals to the Vatican to re-open parishes in the Batesville and Terre Haute deaneries were denied.

2. Bishop Christopher J. Coyne takes on a new leadership role in southern Indiana.

Starting in October, auxiliary Bishop Christopher J. Coyne—who up until this point was the vicar general in Indianapolis in assistance to Archbishop Tobin—assumed pastoral responsibilities for the archdiocese’s north side parishes, including the New Albany, Seymour and Tell City deaneries in southern Indiana.

Bishop Coyne also serves as administrator of Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and Saint Augustine parishes, both in Jeffersonville.

“We are fortunate to have two bishops to serve the Catholic communities of central and southern Indiana and I would like to make the best use of our episcopal ministry,” Archbishop Tobin said in a letter that was read out in parishes in September. “It is my hope that this new appointment will contribute to advancing the mission of the Church and take advantage of Bishop Coyne’s many gifts.”

Bishop Coyne was originally appointed to Indianapolis in 2011. He took the dedicated much of his time to heading the archdiocese after Archbishop Emeritus Daniel M. Buechlein suffered a stroke and was eventually granted early retirement in the fall of the same year.

The dramatic change in leadership also meant that the Rev. William F. Stumpf was appointed moderator of the curia and an additional vicar general.

3. Four men are ordained to the priesthood for the archdiocese.

Nearly 1,000 people—including more than 80 priests—fired SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral on June 7 to witness the priestly ordination of four men: David Martocci, Benjamin Syberg and Timothy Wycziskala. All four are graduates of Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary in Indianapolis, and received further priestly formation at Saint Meinrad Archabbey and School of Theology in St. Meinrad.

Archbishop Tobin asked all those present to offer their prayers for the men, who can serve Christ’s truth and love with zeal. Speaking directly to the four men, he said, “My brothers, you will be able to speak to the hearts of your people if you know their joys and their sorrows, their anxiety and their whole life. You must be able to lift the burden of administration or the pursuit of your own interests deafen you to the cry of our brothers and sisters who, like you, search for God and hunger for God’s word.”

4. A record $6.1 million is raised to send children to Catholic schools.

It was announced at this year’s Celebrating Catholic Schools Values Award event on Nov. 5 that a record $6.1 million had been raised this year to help children in the Archdiocese receive a Catholic education.

The amount is more than twice the previous record year: $2.9 million in 2012. “I hope you gauged as I did when I heard that figure,” Archbishop Tobin said at the event. “It is remarkable! It is truly remarkable.”

It’s a sign of the generous gifts of people within the Church and without, because they believe in us: “We are trying to do with Catholic education.”

5. High court upholds religious liberty for closely held businesses.

On June 30, the U.S. Supreme Court in a 5-4 decision—ruling in Burwell v. Hobby Lobby—that closely held companies cannot be forced to comply with the Affordable Care Act’s (HHS) mandate that requires nearly all employers to provide abortion-inducing drugs, elective sterilizations and contraceptives to their employees free of charge if the individual or families that own these businesses have religious objections to the mandate.

Bill Grove is a member of a family that owns such a business, reported Sean Gallagher. “Since 1901, the Grove family has owned the Madison-based Grove Industries, a manufacturer of commercial vehicle lighting products.”

Grove said that he learned of the ruling about 10 minutes before his wife Terry was in the room. I gave her a hug and a big smile. It’s a wonderful day.”

Grove jointed his thanks to his family-owned company’s president and chief executive officer, and members of President Peter Buechlein’s administration who had previously argued their case with success before the U.S. 7th Circuit Court of Appeals in Indianapolis.

6. Indiana’s bishops voice their support for a proposed state amendment defining marriage as between one man and woman.

Glen Tollef, executive director of the Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC), spoke on behalf of the Indiana’s six Catholic bishops on March 13 during Indiana House Judiciary Committee meeting to express their support of House Joint Resolution 3 (HJR-3).

The proposed constitutional amendment defined marriage as a union between one man and one woman, and stated that other legal unions “identical or substantially similar to that of marriage” would not be recognized by the state.

In addition to supporting the proposed amendment, the state’s bishops also pressed the Church’s teaching on the dignity of every human person, including those persons with same-sex attraction, which effectively regulated same-sex marriage in the state of Indiana.

7. Archbishop Emeritus Buechlein marks 50 years of priestly life.

Retired Archbishop Daniel M. Buechlein, currently in residence at Saint Meinrad Archabbey, celebrated the 50th anniversary of his priestly ordination on May 3.

The archbishop, who led the archdiocese for 19 years, was ordained a priest at a Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary in 1964, and ever since has seen prayer as his primary focus.

“That was the case no matter what other aspects of his ministry came to the fore—priestly formation, pastoral leadership, catechesis or Catholic education,” wrote reporter Sean Gallagher.

“Every challenge was his own grace,” Archbishop Buechlein said. “Even [my] stroke had a way of waking me up to what’s really meaningful in life. Cancer was the same way. That’s the way I took it into prayer.”

8. Daughters of Charity say goodbye after 135 years of ministry in the archdiocese.

In 1881, four Daughters of Charity arrived in Indianapolis to establish a house for the sick in an uneasy downtown. So began what is now known as St. Vincent Hospital, wrote reporter Natalie Hoefner.

“As in 1881, there are now four Daughters of Charity in Indianapolis. They will file to June, thus ending 133 years of service in the order in the archdiocese.”

“During those 133 years, more than 350 Daughters of Charity have ministered, leaving behind the legacy of St. Vincent Health, a system of 21 hospitals statewide.”

The announcement that the sisters would leave the archdiocese—and the Lafayette Diocese as well—came in October of 2013, and was finalized with a Mass of Thanksgiving at the SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis on April 28.

“Today, sisters, we thank you for your service,” said Archbishop Tobin in his homily. He commented on “the impressive legacy that [the Sisters] leave behind, which certainly is a tribute to [Daughters of Charity co-founder] St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac—a health system that will continue to provide care for the underprivileged, the poor and the marginalized.”

9. A year of pro-life news culminates with the opening of a Women’s Care Center next to Planned Parenthood.

The new Women’s Care Center on the north side of Indianapolis was blessed by Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin on Nov. 19, opening its doors next to the state’s largest Planned Parenthood abortion facility.

“Founded in South Bend, Ind., in 1984, Women’s Care Center is a 100 percent donor-funded organization that builds facilities near abortion centers,” reported Natalie Hoefner. “At its 23 facilities spread among seven states, they offer free counseling and ultrasound to women considering abortion, and support women during their pregnancy.”

The opening came in the same year that Affiliated Women’s Services, one of Indianapolis’ largest abortion providers, closed its doors, and also when a former Planned Parenthood nurse walked away from her line of work and now is a staunch pro-life advocate.

Pro-life legislation—including a requirement for abortion centers to keep a physician on backup at a local hospital in case of complication—was also passed 6-4 by the state legislature.

The archdiocese also combines its pro-life and family life offices to better integrate the two ministries.

10. Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary celebrates 10 years of priestly formation.

Ten years ago this fall, Archbishop Emeritus Buechlein opened the Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary with six seminarians, all who lived on the campus of Marian University in Indianapolis.

A decade later on Sept. 8, “approximately 230 people gathered on the grounds of a former Carmelite monastery that the seminary has called its home since 2008 to celebrate the many ways in which the seminary has grown over its first decade,” reported reporter Sean Gallagher.

“That growth was on display in the presence of the 42 seminarians from eight dioceses and archdioceses currently enrolled at the seminary.”

Archbishop Buechlein was unable to attend the event, but recorded a message, saying, “To you seminarians, students at Bruté, congratulations on this anniversary. My thanks to you, for you have indeed become a house of joy, a happy community, a community fueled by joy and the happiness that comes from living a true human life made so by being grounded in faith, charity and hope.”

(To read the original coverage, including archived links of interest, click on the headline for this story on our website at www.CriterionOnline.com.)
We celebrate the Incarnation

“The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14).

That’s how John’s Gospel reported the magnificent mystery of the Incarnation, the amazing fact that Almighty God actually lowered himself to become a human being. That’s the mystery we celebrate this Christmas. Let us rejoice as we celebrate the birth of a baby in Bethlehem, but let us remember that he was far more than just a human baby.

John tells us as plainly as possible, “In the beginning was the Word” (he existed from all eternity), “and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn 1:1). To make it even clearer, he identifies the Word with creation, saying, “All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be” (Jn 1:3).

We Catholics will profess our belief in the Incarnation when we recite the Creed on Christmas, as we do every weekend. We say that we believe “in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, who was born of the Virgin Mary and became man.” St. Paul taught the pre-existence of Jesus Christ. In his Letter to the Philippians, written perhaps as early as 55 A.D., he quoted a hymn that already existed: “Jesus Christ, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness” (Phil 2:6-7).

Paul wrote about God sending his Son in other letters, too. For example, to the Galatians he wrote, “When the fullness of time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman” (Gal 4:4). To the Romans he wrote, “Sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom 8:3).

This has been the belief of Christians down through the centuries—that Jesus was true God, existing from all eternity, and through whom all things were made, but at a particular moment in history also became a human being. He was both God and man, fully human with all our imperfections and weaknesses except sin, while remaining the perfect and infinitely powerful God. He is not part God and part man, or some confused mixture but fully human while remaining God.

But why did God choose to assume our human nature? Various reasons are given: The Word became flesh in order to save us by reconciling us with God; so that thus we might know God’s love; to be our model of holiness; to make us partakers of the divine nature.

The ultimate reason, though, is because God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation, our redemption, in it. That couldn’t be done by just any human, but it did require a human to do it. Since Jesus is both divine and human, he is the one and only mediator between God and humans.

Because we have been redeemed by the God-man, we humans can share God’s divine nature. Ever since the beginning of Christian theology, the reason for the Incarnation has been “so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God” (St. Irenaeus, second century).

St. Leo the Great wrote, in a passage that is read in the Office of Readings of the Liturgy of the Hours of Christmas day, “In the fullness of time, chosen in the unfathomable depths of God’s wisdom, the Son of God took for himself our common humanity in order to reconcile it with his creator. It came to overthrow the devil, the origin of death, in that very nature by which he had overthrown mankind.”

Later in the same passage, St. Leo wrote, “And so at the birth of our Lord the angels sing in joy: ‘Glory to God in the highest’, and they proclaim, ‘Peace to his people on Earth’ (Lk 2:14) as they see the heavenly Jerusalem being built from all the nations of the world. When the angels on high are so exultant at this marvelous work of God’s goodness, what joy should it not bring to the lowly hearts of men?”

We wish you a happy and blessed Christmas.

—John F. Finn

Making Sense of Bioethics/ Fr. Tad Pacholczyk

Are womb transplants immoral?

A recent news report described the unusual story of a baby’s birth from his grandmother’s womb. A 29-year-old woman, born in Sweden, born without a uterus, received a transplanted womb from her mother, the same womb that had brought her into the world a generation earlier. The woman then became pregnant through in vitro fertilization (IVF) and delivered a healthy baby boy.

The research had been dogged by controversy and questions. Could a transplanted womb from a post-menopausal woman be “triggered” back into action once it had been introduced into the body of a younger woman? Could a transplanted uterus effectively provide nourishment to a growing baby during all the gestational stages of a pregnancy? Would such a costly and risky surgery involving two people—a mother and daughter, donor and recipient, be justifiable? Are such transplants ultimately ethical?

The specific circumstances involved are critical to determining whether this novel type of mutilating surgery is ethical. Various medical anomalies can cause a woman to be missing a uterus. A congenital disease called Kallmania syndrome can cause the uterus to develop abnormally, or not at all. Further complicating matters, in the very rare situation where a patient also fails, and another person donates a healthy replacement organ.

Yet others would say that the womb is not a vital organ like a kidney, and while the transplantation of a womb is directed toward improving a patient’s quality of life, it clearly does not constitute life-saving surgery like a kidney transplant. Therefore, womb transplants require strong ethical justifications.

Letter to the Editor

Widower’s column offers heartfelt wisdom for those who have lost loved ones

“I am writing in regard to Bill Dodds’ ‘Your Family’ column in the Dec. 5 issue of The Criterion. I would like to thank you for putting into words what I am sure is in the hearts of many widowers.

I lost my husband, Rob, on Dec. 27, 2011, and as Dodds states, “It feels like yesterday.” Every word in this column is so true, and my hope is that it reaches many. I would like to offer two more suggestions. One is to try to avoid asking “How are you?” That question is so immense for any widower to respond to, which is why we most always say “fine” which is far beyond the truth. Try asking a specific question that relates to that individual. Additionally, stay away from saying, “Let me know if I can do anything.” Though well-intentioned, that puts the responsibility on the widower to ask for help which can be difficult. Rather choose a specific chore or errand for that person, and plan to follow through with it, even if it is just showing up for a visit.

We all have much to learn about each other in each of our individual lives that God has given us. Thank you again, Bill Dodds, for sharing part of your life and your gift of writing with us.

Ellen Henke

Greenwood

Be Our Guest/Daniel Elsener

Preparing leaders for service to the Church and the world

I hope you’ve heard the news: Marian University’s Football Knights are headed to the NCAA (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics) national championships in Daytona Beach, Fla., on Dec. 19, to play the Southern Oregon University Raiders. The game is scheduled for 3 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, and will be broadcast on ESPN2. WNFN 107.5 FM in Indianapolis and simulcast online at www.muknights.com. I hope you can join us!

Marian University is committed to excellence in every endeavor. Our success in athletics mirrors our success in the classroom; our students, faculty and staff simply want to be the best at what we do. Marian’s mission is to prepare our students for transformational leadership positions in a variety of professions. Athletics is just one of the laboratories on campus where leadership development occurs. More than one-quarter of our undergraduates participate in intercollegiate athletics, and they are learning the importance of teamwork, accountability, discipline, perseverance through adversity, and the pursuit of excellence. We’re building character and developing leaders through athletics.

Our athletic director, Steve Downing, has ingrained into the culture at Marian University the principle that academics always come first, and he has set up study tables to ensure our student-athletes succeed in the classroom. Steve’s leadership on the field, in the classroom and in the community, is reflected in the right order, and we’re putting student-athletes on the field that our alumni and fans can be proud of. We believe that athletics build character, especially when combined with the kind of values that a Catholic university like Marian espouses.

Marian’s mission is to be a great Catholic university in the Franciscan and liberal arts tradition.

Marian University is on the rise. We’re collaborating with the Archdiocese of Indianapolis to provide academic formation for students at Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary. We’re also preparing lay women and men for ministry in Catholic parishes and schools through our award-winning San Damiano Scholars program. We’re helping to solve Indiana’s doctor shortage by opening the state’s first new medical school in over a century. We’re training teachers to serve in Catholic schools as well as public, private and charter schools in very diverse regions and circumstances.

We have record enrollment in our freshman class has the best average GPAs and SAT scores in the history of the Marian University. This has been the belief of Christians for 2,000 years. We say that we believe the Incarnation, the story of God becoming man.

Most Rev. Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R., Publisher

Greg A. Otolski, Associate Publisher

Mike Krokos, Editor

John F. Finn, Editor Emeritus

Nativity at Night” by Italian Baroque painter Guido Reni depicts the birth of Christ in a Bethlehem manger. The Feast of the Nativity of Christ, a holy day of obligation, is celebrated on Dec. 25. (CatholicPhillyArtLibrary)
Christmas is a feast of joy in heaven, on Earth

Merry Christmas! Do you think the saints and angels celebrate Christmas in heaven? I hope so. This is a wonderful feast—filled with warmth and love, peace and joy. I know that every day is wonderful in heaven, but I’m sure that even heavenly bliss can be increased—at least one day a year—with the magnificent sounds of an angelic choir and the brilliant glow of yet another shining star!

I can just imagine the joy that our Blessed Mother and all the saints must feel on this very special day. Do you suppose that if we asked them with humble hearts this Christmas Day, they would open the gates of heaven—just enough—to let their joy overflow, filling our troubled world with at least a small share of the happiness and peace they possess in eternal life with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

We associate “joy” with Christmas. Do you know what joy is? Have you experienced it lately?

In his autobiography, Surprised by Joy, the English writer C. S. Lewis experienced it lately? Isn’t it amazing how these simple teaching devices cut right to the heart of the matter? Volumes of philosophy, theology and spirituality have been written on the concepts of joy and happiness. The nuances they contain are important, I guess, for the fullness or accuracy of our understanding, but what the sisters taught is no less profound. If you place Jesus first in your life, you will feel the fullness of joy in your heart. If you place Jesus first in your life, you will be surprised by joy!

Jesus Christ is the greatest Christmas gift, the source of all real joy. He is the gift of God the Father, who became one of us in all things but sin by the power of Holy Spirit. This amazing gift was first given to Mary, and then to all of us, to save us from the destructive power of sin and death. This is the joy, the fulfillment, of all human-desiring. This is what we celebrate today—on Earth, as I hope, in heaven. This is the day when we call to mind most vividly the mystery of the Incarnation and the joy of Christ’s birth.

This is a wonderful feast filled with happiness. In heaven, there are no tears, no sorrow and no worries about tomorrow. Because heaven is not really a place—a geographic location—but is an experience of loving closeness (communion) with the God who is our hearts’ desire, it’s hard to imagine what this great celebration of joy looks like. We use images of music and dancing and sumptuous food because that’s what our earthly celebrations are like. The joy in heaven on Christmas Day cannot be accurately described in earthly words or images, but we believe with all our hearts that those who have gone before us to our heavenly home rejoice on this day. And, as I say above, we hope and pray that this joy will spill over and bring peace on Earth—today and always.

Jesus is our joy. When you place him first, others second and yourself third, everything falls into proper perspective. Thank you, Heavenly Father, for this marvelous gift of your love. Help us be good stewards of joy by sharing it generously with others this Christmas season. ¡Feliz Navidad!

La Navidad es una fiesta de alegría en el Cielo, celebrada en la Tierra

¡Feliz Navidad! ¡Ustedes creen que los santos y los ángeles celebran la Navidad en el Cielo? Espero que sí. Esta es una fiesta maravillosa, repleta de efusividad, amor, paz y alegría. Sé que en el Cielo todos los días son maravillosos, pero estoy seguro de que la felicidad celestial aumenta todavía un poquito más, por lo menos una vez al año, al magnífico componer copios celestiales y el refugio de otra estrella titilante.

Apenas puedo imaginarme la alegría que deben sentir nuestra Santa Madre y todos los santos en este día tan especial. ¡Creen que si les rogamos con humor de corazón en este Día de Navidad, nos abrirán las puertas del cielo, aunque sea una rendija, para que esa alegría llave y colme nuestro mundo afligido, al menos con una pequeña cuota de la felicidad y de la paz que experimentan en la eterna residencia junto al Dios Padre, Hijo y Espíritu Santo?

Asociamos la Navidad con la alegría. ¿Acaso saben qué es la alegría? ¿La han experimentado en su vida? En su autobiografía titulada Surprised by Joy (Surprendido por la alegría) el escritor inglés C. S. Lewis habla acerca de la alegría como algo muy importante de plasmar o incluso de la felicidad. La alegría es algo más profundo, más intenso y más impreciso; nos toma por sorpresa e infunde tremendeadamente sobre nosotros. La alegría es la satisfacción de los deseos más profundos. Esta es extremadamente vinculada al quehacer divino al que alude San Agustín al escribir que nuestros corazones no tienen sosiego hasta que encontramos el descanso supremo en Dios.

Cuando era yo un niño de escuela primaria, las Hermanas nos dieron una herramienta muy sencilla y muy profunda a la vez, para aprender el significado de la alegría. Nos dijeron que al deletrear la palabra alegría (en inglés “joy”), la “j” es de Jesús que siempre tiene que ser lo primero en nuestras vidas. La “o” de los otros que vienen de segundo; y la “y” del yo. Coloquemos a Jesús de primero, a los otros en segundo lugar y al “yo” en tercer lugar, y sabrán lo que es la alegría (joy).

“¿No les parece increíble que una técnica de enseñanza tan sencilla encierre un significado tan poderoso?” Se han escrito numerosos libros de filosofía, teología y espiritualidad sobre los conceptos de la alegría y la felicidad. Supongo que las sutilezas que resaltan son muy importantes para llegar a comprenderlos a plenitud y con exactitud, pero eso no quiere decir que lo que las Hermanas nos enseñaron sea menos trascendental. Si poniésemos a Jesús de primero en nuestras vidas, pensamos en los otros antes que en nosotros mismos, ¿los sorprenderá la alegría? Jesuscristo es el máximo regalo de la Navidad, es la fiesta de la alegría verdadera; es el obsequio del Dios Padre, que se convirtió en uno de nosotros en todo menos en el pecado, por el poder del Espíritu Santo. Este maravilloso regalo le fue entregado primero a María y luego al resto de nosotros para salvarnos del poder destructivo del pecado y de la muerte. Esta es la alegría, la satisfacción de todos los ángeles humanos. Esto es lo que celebramos hoy en la Tierra, así como en el Cielo (espero). Este es el día en el que evocamos más vivamente el misterio de la Encarnación y la alegría del nacimiento de Cristo.

Todos los demás regalos de la Navidad resultan mediocres al compararlos con este: “Porque tanto amó Dios al mundo, que dio a su único Hijo, para que todo el que cree en él no se pierda, sino que tenga vida eterna. Dios no envió a su Hijo al mundo para condenar al mundo, sino para salvarlo por medio de él” (Jn 3:16-17).

En el día de Navidad, y durante toda esta temporada de júbilo, nos invita a unirnos a María y a todos los ángeles y santos, en un festival de paz y felicidad, lleno de alegría. En el Cielo no hay lágrimas, no hay dolor ni preocupaciones acerca del mañana. Puesto que el cielo no es en verdad un lugar, una ubicación geográfica, sino la experiencia de vivir en armonioso y amoroso encuentro (en comunión) con un Dios que es el anhelo de nuestros corazones, cuesta un poco imaginarse cómo será esta enorme celebración de alegría. Empleamos las imágenes de coros musicales, danzas y luces ornamentales porque así es como lucen nuestras celebraciones terrenales.

La alegría en el Cielo durante el Día de la Navidad no se puede describir exactamente con palabras o imágenes mundanas, pero creemos con todo el corazón que aquellos que han partido antes que nosotros a nuestro hogar celestial se llenan de júbilo en este día. Y, tal como dije antes, esperamos y rezamos para que esta alegría se derrame y traiga paz a la Tierra, hoy y siempre.

Jesús es nuestra alegría: cuando lo colocamos a El de primero, a los otros en segundo lugar y al “yo” de tercer lugar, todo cae en su debido lugar. Gracias, Padre Celestial, por el maravilloso regalo de tu amor. Ayúdanos a ser buenos administradores de la alegría para compartirla generosamente con los demás durante esta temporada navideña. ¡Feliz Navidad! Título Traducido por: Daniela Guanipa
Events Calendar

December 19

December 20
St. Michael the Archangel Church, 3354 W. 30th St., Indianapolis. Helpers of God’s Precious Infants, Mass and Divine Mercy Chaplet at 8:30 a.m., followed by prayer at a local abortion center, and continued prayer at the church for those who wish to remain.

January 2
Mount Saint Francis Retreat Center, 101 Mt. St. Francis Drive, Mt. St. Francis. First Friday devotions and lunch, 11:45 a.m. Information: 812-923-8817 or retreats@moundsaintfrancis.org.

January 3
Keroxen Center, Monastery Immaculate Conception, 841 E. 14th St., Ferdinand. Spanish Program, “The Epiphany 2015,” Benedictine Sister Joan Scheller, presenter, 2-6 p.m., no charge, evening meal will be served, please bring a dessert to share, reservations due Dec. 31. Information: 812-367-1411, ext. 2656 or www.thedomed.org/programs.

January 5
Mount Saint Francis Retreat Center, 101 Mt. St. Francis Drive, Mt. St. Francis. Mondays at the Mount, Franciscan Brother Bob Baxter, 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. Information: 812-923-8817 or retreats@moundsaintfrancis.org.

January 7
Benedictus In Service and Retreat Center, 1402 South Avenue, Beech Grove Personal Retreat Day: Spend a Day with God, 9 a.m.–4 p.m., $35 per person includes a room for the day and lunch, spiritual direction available. Information: 317-786-7581 or www.benedictusin.com.

New Albany Deanery Youth Ministry to celebrate 50th jubilee Mass on Jan. 11
Catholic Youth Ministry of the New Albany Deanery will celebrate a 50th jubilee Mass at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, 1752 Scheller Lane, in New Albany at 3 p.m. on Jan. 11. The theme will be “50 Years of Faith, Family and Friends.”

Catholic Radio Indy offers six-week ‘Catholics Returning Home’ program
Catholic Radio Indy, 8383 Craig Street, Suite 280, in Indianapolis, will offer a six-week series titled, “Catholics Returning Home,” from 10-11:30 a.m. beginning on Jan. 16. The sessions are for non-practicing Catholics who are seeking answers to questions about returning to the Church. If you know of someone who has left the Church, please invite them to join us. Deadline for registering for this series is Jan. 12. For more information and registration, call 317-870-8400.

Woman professes first monastic vows with Sisters of St. Benedict in Beech Grove
On July 12, the Sisters of St. Benedict of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, along with family members and friends, witnessed the first monastic profession of Sister Susan Elizabeth Rakers. Sister Susan Elizabeth is one of five children born to Vernon and Barbara Rakers. She is originally from Belleville, Ill. She received her bachelor’s degree in computer science from Southern Illinois University in 1989, and later received her master’s degree in management from Lake Forest Graduate School of Management in Lake Forest, Ill. Prior to her entrance to the community, Sister Susan Elizabeth was employed by United Health Group.

VIPS

Charles “Charlie” and Margaret “Peggy” (Cashman) McIntosh, members of Holy Spirit Parish in Indianapolis, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on Dec. 26. The couple was married on Dec. 26, 1964, at St. Therese of the Infant Jesus (Little Flower) Church in Indianapolis. They are the parents of four children, Kimberly Dickson, Kelly Gordon, Margaret McIntosh and Molly O’Connor. They also have six grandchildren. Their children send their love and congratulations.

Anna Fan enters Sisters of Providence as postulant
On Nov. 13, Anna Fan, a native of Taiwan, was received into the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in St. Mary-of-the-Woods, as a postulant. During her time of postulancy, Fan will work as a volunteer once a month in the local area, as well as take time volunteering with other Sisters of Providence across the country. Fan will live within the formation community of the Sisters of Providence, located in Owens Hall. Her relationship with the Sisters of Providence began while volunteering with Sisters of Providence at Miracle Home in Taiwan in 2011. After a year as a postulant, Fan will be eligible to enter into the first year of the novitiate, when she will receive the title of sister.

Saint Meinrad Archabbev Guest House Chapel, 200 Hill Drive, Saint Meinrad. Longest Night Service, prayer, Scripture and music acknowledging God’s presence for those mourning and struggling with loss during the holidays, 6 p.m. CST. Information or RSVP (expected but not required) 800-987-7380 delilah@thebeckesths.com.

December 27
St. John the Evangelist Church, 126 W. Georgia St., Indianapolis. Faithful Citizens Rosary procession, Mass, 12:10 p.m., procession following Mass. Information: faithfulcitizens2014@gmail.com.

January 2-24
Theatre on the Square, Indianapolis. Late Nite Comedy recommended for instructive Catechism Late Nite Indianapolis.

January 7
Sisters of Providence General Superior Sister Denise Wilkinson, right, reads with Anna Fan during a welcome ceremony on Nov. 13. (Submitted photo)

January 10

January 22
SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, 1347 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis. Solemn Observance Day of Prayer and Penance, 42nd Anniversary of Roe v. Wade, Mass, noon, prayerful public witness, 1:15 p.m., Benediction and dismissal, 2:30 p.m. Information: 317-236-1551 or crickey@archindy.org.

January 24

January 28
Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, White Violet Center, 1 Sisters of Providence, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. “Nuno Felting Fabric Yardage,” Debby Green, instructor, 1-4 p.m., $100 per person, includes materials, registration deadline Jan. 25. Information: 812-535-2932 or wv@usmpy.org.

Retreats and Programs
Sacramental marriage brings grace to share God's love, Pope Francis says

**VATICAN CITY (CNS)—With the strength of the grace that comes from the sacrament of marriage, Catholic families are called to proclaim God's love to the world, Pope Francis said.**

God's love gives birth to the family, and that love must be "the center of all its human and spiritual dynamism," the pope wrote in a letter on Dec. 10 to Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, which will sponsor the Sept. 22-27 World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia next year. Repeating his promise to attend the gathering in Philadelphia, Pope Francis thanked the Archdiocese of Philadelphia for generously committing itself to organize and host the event as a "service to the universal Church and to families on every continent."

The October extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the family and the general assembly of bishops scheduled to meet in 2015, are attempting to identify the most urgent needs of families today and to devise pastoral responses to them, he said.

However, the pope wrote, "the values and virtues of the family, its essential truths, are points of strength on which to build the nuclear family and are not up for discussion."

The Vatican released the text of the pope's letter on Dec. 10, shortly after he spoke about the synod at his weekly general audience. He told people gathered in St. Peter's Square that no one at the extraordinary synod "called into question the fundamental truths about the sacrament of marriage: its indissolubility, unity, fidelity and openness to life."

Preparations for the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia continued as the Synod of Bishops on the family a few weeks later, he said, the Church is seeking ways "to proclaim the Gospel of marriage and the family" in a way that responds to "the social and cultural contexts in which we live."

"The challenges of these contexts stimulate us to enlarge the spaces of faithful love open to life, to communion, mercy and solidarity," the pope said. Catholic couples, priests and parish communities "must let themselves be guided by the word of God, which is the foundation for the holy construction of the family as a domestic Church and of the family of God."
Christmas homilies remembered

By Natalie Kelker

Of the many Christmas homilies I’ve heard in my life, two stand out.

The first one was 25 years ago, when my brother and I both knew the priest, a wonderful, faithful African priest. A hospital conversion, he had been without sleep for almost 24 hours. He was tired during that Mass, a state which made his account stronger and harder to understand.

During his homily, he returned to the theme of the ‘sandy cloud.’ All of our flaming candles were put out, including the beautiful ones on the altar. The ‘sandy cloud’! All of our flaming candles were put out, including the beautiful ones on the altar.

He spoke of how Christmas cards depicting the peaceful manger scene probably misrepresent the reality of the actual event. A young woman giving birth to a first child in a not-so-warm stable with animals all around, far from home and with no familiar women to help—unless it was perhaps being ‘sandy’ Chritmas. My mother was always would be much less change for the new baby. Our mother used to tell us on Christmas morning, “God brought us another baby.”

For the first time, my mother didn’t feel the need to investigate. They joined in the song as well. Some students that thought that I had planned it, knew us. I set the truck into position and started the engine. The snow began to lightly fall. It was partly cloudy, with a gentle snowing.

We all stood around and began singing other Christmas carols. Some students would join in and the crowd began to swell. Some faculty, hearing the noise, came out to investigate. They joined in the song as well. Some students would join in and the crowd began to swell. Some faculty, hearing the noise, came out to investigate.

The snow continued to come down furiously, and the wind was howling on the side of the road along the interior. We went back to school and picked up my roommate and a chauffeur. I had some experience falling trees, so I was pretty confident I could get it clear that way. I’m sure Aunt Mary enjoyed that coat quite a bit.

Christmas isn’t about lots of presents under the tree. ‘Jesus’ birth was over 2000 years ago, not just another political event. His birth was more than just a gift and Canon 376 defines the gift as we find it in the manger scene.

In addition, even the total of the gift of childless couples, we can all see a profound meaning in the manger scene. The childless couples, we can all see a profound meaning in the manger scene.

My excitement turned to disappointment when I found out that my parents had sent the baby after all. The baby had then been born at another hospital already. The baby had then been born at another hospital already.

A lesson in the gift of giving

By Stanley Domeck

It had moved all Christmas Eve day that Christmas of 1948, and the excitement of Christmas was under way—while having Mass at the school. We borrowed another vehicle and went to the school. We quickly became snowbound.

While driving back to the college somewhat disappointed that I wasn't at that moment, it was my first semester at St. Mary’s College, and a true ‘God's gift’ to me.

Dad recall the adventures of Santa's little reindeer to our house.

It was the Christmas season of 1971 I was asked by Father Luke, sister of St. Monica Parish in Catonsville, to take the college-owned pick-up truck and go get a Christmas tree. He also gave me the college checkbook with a few pre-signed checks.

I then went to town, and on our way home I stopped by the St. Patrick’s Catholic Church that was soon to become a new building that would be one of the first go to...while having Masses and the sacraments in the school cafeteria—to meet the needs of the growing parish.

The Criterion   Friday, December 19, 2014

Christmas on the run always was fun

By Robert Schott

Midnight Mass was a given in our family. Breakfast was eaten at home out of the way. Mason’s or home and family.

Off we would go to the closer store and on 6 p.m., getting home, eating supper and then “sitting down” to the “First” of the year! “Why? One small bathroom, and we needed one for the Christmas tree.”

We took turns, but Mom was first because she was a perfectionist. She had to be in the tree left by 11 p.m. Who would get the needles and the branches and trees to the children.

My favorite memory of all time took place on Christmas Eve, Christmas Eve. And we were getting ready for Mass, getting ready for the rest of the morning. It was the Christmas Mass week that was free of charge to my mother, in time for Christmas Day.

St. John’s Seminary in Denver, Colo., to take the gift of giving to the students who thought that I had planned the whole thing.

Dad recall the adventures of Santa's little reindeer to our house.

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The Criterion   Friday, December 19, 2014

A girl holds a figurine of baby Jesus as Pope Francis leads the Angelus on December 24, 2014. (AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia)
Vatican report calls U.S. women religious to continued dialogue

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—A massive, detailed Vatican-ordered investigation of U.S. communities of women religious ended with a call to the women themselves to continue discerning how best to live the Gospel in fidelity to their orders’ founding ideals while facing steeply declining numbers and a rapidly aging membership.

Although initially seen by many religious and lay Catholics as a punitive measure, the apostolic visitation concluded with the publication on Dec. 16 of a 5,000-word final report summarizing the problems and challenges the women see in their communities, and thanking them for their service to the Church and to society, especially the poor.

The visitation process, carried out between 2009 and 2012 with detailed questionnaires and on-site visits, mainly by other women religious, “sought to convey the caring support of the Church in respectful, sister-to-sister dialogue,” says the final report by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

The process attempted to help the Vatican “and the sisters themselves to be more cognizant of their current situation and challenges in order to formulate realistic, effective plans for the future,” said the report, signed by Cardinal Joan Braz de Aviz, prefect of the congregation for religious, and Archbishop Jose Rodriguez Carballo, secretary.

In summarizing the results, the congregation called for special attention in several areas, including: formation programs for new members; the personal, liturgical and common prayer life of members; ensuring their spiritual practices and ministries are fully in harmony with Church teaching “about God, creation, the Incarnation and redemption” in Christ; strengthening community life, especially for members living on their own or with just one other sister; living their vow of poverty while wisely administering financial resources; and strengthening communion within the Church, especially with the bishops and Vatican officials.

The Vatican, the report says, “is well aware that the apostolic visitation was met with apprehension and suspicion by some women religious. This resulted in a refusal, on the part of some institutes, to collaborate fully in the process.”

“While the lack of full cooperation was a painful disappointment for us,” the congregation writes, “we use this present opportunity to invite all religious institutes to accept our willingness to engage in respectful and fruitful dialogue with them. "A number of sisters conveyed to the apostolic visitator a desire for greater recognition and support of the contribution of women religious to the Church on the part of its pastors,” the report says. “They noted the ongoing need for honest dialogue with bishops and clergy as a means of clarifying their role in the Church and strengthening their witness and effectiveness as women faithful to the Church’s teaching and mission.”

In addition, it says, “some spoke of their perceptions of not having enough input into pastoral decisions which affect them or about which they have considerable experience and expertise.”

The current Year of Consecrated Life, the congregation says, should be “a grace-filled opportunity for all of us within the Church—religious, clergy and laity—to take those steps toward forgiveness and reconciliation, which will offer a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion to all.”

The congregation’s report does not make specific recommendations other than urging the entire Church “to offer fervent prayer for religious vocations,” and to ask religious communities to ensure they provide “a solid, theological, human, cultural, spiritual and pastoral preparation” for religious life.
The Word of God was made flesh to change humanity forever

By David Gibson

From a vantage point near the top of a large hill in Canada, my wife and I gazed late last summer upon a breathtaking view of the St. Lawrence River. The weather was perfect that day, and as we visited to Quebec City drew to a close we wanted to take in this marvelous scene one last time, knowing it soon would become little more than a memory for us.

Naturally, we photographed the view in order to take a bit of it home with us. We knew, though, that our life was about to return to normal.

A familiar scene captivates Christians in a similar way, and at Christmastime they spend time gazing upon it. The scene depicts Mary, Joseph and the newborn Jesus. Shepherds are on hand, too, having received “good news of great joy” from an angel, who told them “This will be a sign for you: You will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger” (Lk 2:10, 12).

The scene adorns countless Christmas cards, conveying the season’s warmth. And families bring children forward after Christmastime Masses to view their parish’s nativity scene. They linger, and nowadays they may even photograph it with smartphones so as to take a bit of it home with them.

The great hope of Christmas, however, is that life will not return to normal after its celebrations draw to a close. Christmas stirs hearts, its welcome scenes attract our gaze. But Christianity affirms that the meaning of Christmas is not outside believers’ lives, ready to be left behind the way the St. Lawrence River or Mt. Rainier or the Grand Canyon get left behind when a vacation ends.

Christmas invites Christians not just to celebrate Jesus’ birth for a few days, but to let him come to live in us repeatedly in the year ahead. The hidden gift of Christmas is its commission, its mandate to Christians.

The child in the manger on Christmas is the Word of God made flesh. As Ireland’s Archbishop Diarmuid Martin once put it, entering into “the mystery of the Word made flesh” involves seeing “how we can sanctify the world around us, in all its corporeity, its bodily-ness, in its concrete expressions.”

The Gospel reading heard by those participating in the Mass of Christmas Day proclaims that “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (Jn 1:14). Notably, that biblical statement comprises two essential, interrelated points: first, that the Word of God “became flesh”; second, that biblical statement comprises two essential, interrelated points: first, that the Word of God “made his dwelling among us.”

Focusing on the statement’s second part, allow me to inquire what difference it makes that the Word of God made his dwelling among us.

The child Jesus “remains forever the sign of God’s tenderness and presence in our world,” Pope Francis remarked during a May 2014 visit to Bethlehem. Like every other child, the infant Jesus was “vulnerable.” He needed “to be accepted and protected,” the pope pointed out. He stressed that “today, too, children need to be welcomed and defended from the moment of their conception.”

Pope Francis considered today’s children, like the infant Jesus, a sign for the world. “They are a sign of hope, a sign of life, but also a ‘diagnostic’ sign, a marker indicating the health of families, society and the entire world.”

The pope continued:

“Such a frank and honest diagnosis can lead us to a new kind of lifestyle where our relationships are no longer marked by conflict, oppression and consumerism, but fraternity, forgiveness and reconciliation, solidarity and love.”

In the pantheon of gods honored by the ancients, there may have been those who were remote from human beings, arbitrary in their actions or supremely proud. But the Word of God made flesh reveals that the one God is not absent but very much present in the life of every person. God “does not stay aloof from his creation but is involved, although mysteriously, in human history,” according to Passionist Father Donald Senior. The American biblical scholar said in 2013 that the god

revealed in the Bible “is a God who self-communicates, a God who is not self-contained but one who wishes to reveal himself to the world.”

Communication tends to improve a hundredfold whenever it is possible for two people to hear each other’s voices and, even better, speak face to face. This is where e-mails and text messages fall short. They have a capacity to hide feelings and emotions, and to reduce communication to its barest essentials.

Indeed, though, the Word of God made flesh communicates face to face. He is known as Emmanuel, meaning “God with us.” Dwelling among people and walking alongside them, his face reveals the face of God. Recent popes call it a face of love and mercy.

Once again, though, the presence of the Word of God is a call to action. It is a call that invites Christians to do whatever they can to reveal the loving, merciful face of God to others.

(David Gibson served on Catholic News Service’s editorial staff for 37 years.)

The Scriptures offer us different perspectives on the birth of Christ

By Daniel S. Nuhall

Christmas is a time of music, decorations, family traditions, food and presents—for those who are fortunate. All inquiries about Jesus, his ministry and mission must begin with Scripture. While the New Testament writers reflect on these aspects of Jesus, there isn’t a passage that provides a comprehensive answer as to why God became man.

We recite the creed at Mass each Sunday and solemn feast day, proclaiming our belief that Jesus “became man.” This is known as the Incarnation, which means “became flesh.” It is one of the fundamental mysteries of the faith, a mystery rich beyond measure but one that we can never fully comprehend.

That being said, our love for God moves our hearts and minds to probe ever deeper into this mystery nonetheless. All inquiries about Jesus, his ministry and mission must begin with Scripture. While the New Testament writers reflect on these aspects of Jesus, there isn’t a passage that provides a comprehensive answer as to why God became man.

St. Matthew’s Gospel, likely written for a Jewish Christian community, emphasizes that Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promise to send a Messiah, a successor to the Hebrew king, David. As such, Jesus fulfills the many prophecies in the Old Testament and then some. He’s not only the Messiah, but also the Son of God. St. Luke offers a more complex story of who Jesus is and why he came. For Luke, Jesus is the presence of the Lord who breaks into this world through miraculous

means to bring glad tidings. Luke says that Jesus comes to show mercy, to proclaim “the acceptable year of the Lord,” to throw down rulers and lift up the lowly, and fill the hungry with “good things” (Lk 1:50-55).

In Luke, we are also given the reason to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God” (Lk 1:77-78).

While the Nativity stories found in Matthew and Luke are the most familiar, the Gospel according to John gives us the most complete answer. John says God became flesh and lived among us so we could see his glory, and through that glory, experience God.

Pope Francis has called us to be a Church of mercy, to experience God’s mercy and to share it. How does our understanding of Christmas change if, when we look at the nativity scene and see the Christ child in the manger, our first thought is of God’s love for us? How will our experience of Christmas change if we are overwhelmed with an appreciation of God’s mercy, and are moved to share that mercy with everyone?

Our Christmas celebrations may become richer and more meaningful when we celebrate the wonders that God’s loving mercy creates in our hearts and minds.

(Daniel S. Nuhall is a freelance writer and a catechist for adults. He lives in Laurel, Maryland.)

A family prays in front of a creche following a Divine Liturgy marking the birth of Christ at Holy Family Ukrainian Catholic Church in Lindenhurst, N.Y. When Jesus Christ, the Word of God, took on human flesh, humanity was changed forever. (CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz)
Catholic Education Outreach/Margaret Hendricks

A Promise to Keep marks 20 years of service in archdiocese

The A Promise to Keep (APTK) chapistry program has grown from a “pilot program” to a national effort at St. Vincent Health and the archdiocesan Office of Catholic Education. A A minis...
Fourth Sunday of Advent/Msgr. Owen E. Campion

**Sunday Readings**

**Sunday, December 21, 2014**

- 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16
- Romans 16:23-27
- Luke 1:26-38

The first reading for this weekend is from the Second Book of Samuel. The two Books of Samuel once were a single volume, but translations and editions over the centuries divided this important text into two volumes.

David is the principal figure in these books. The ancient Hebrews looked upon David much more than as a king. Beyond all else, he was God’s chosen representative, given kingship so that his laws and directives might provide an atmosphere in which the people more fervently could follow God and be loyal to the Covenant.

For this weekend’s second reading, the Church offers us a reading from St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans.

This epistle was Paul’s masterpiece. It appears first in sequence among the 14 epistles attributed to Paul, placed immediately after Paul’s letters.

As indicated by its title, Paul sent this letter to the Christians of Rome. In the first century, Rome was the capital city of the Mediterranean world in every respect—political, economic and cultural. It also was the largest city in the Roman Empire. Not surprisingly, this great imperial capital had within it a broad array of ideas and religions, Christianity among them.

In this weekend’s reading, as often elsewhere, Paul asserts his own vocation as an Apostle, called by God so that “all the Gentiles” might believe in and obey God, “who alone is wise” (Rom 16:26).

But your question raises an interesting point. Does God have a special concern for the things of this world? Is there a special concern for the things of this world, or for the things of the heavens? We know very little of what’s out there beyond ourselves in the entire universe. Are there other solar systems with living beings created by God? Did those planets and cultures need to be saved also, as Christ did for the earth’s inhabitants? What a lot of little about what’s out there beyond ourselves in the entire universe.

The first reading for this weekend is from the prophet Isaiah. The prophet Isaiah was the son of a high priest and lived in Jerusalem. He was a great prophet who predicted the coming of the Messiah, who would be the Suffering Servant of the Lord.

BERREY, Mary A. (Chriestman), 83, Holy Cross, Indianapolis, Dec. 5. Mother of Laura DeMore, Kathleen Young. Grandmother of six.

CARNEY, Marian Brownstown, Nov. 30. Husband of eight.


HANLEY, Bernard, 88, St. Christopher, Indianapolis, Nov. 29. Father of Kevin Hanley. Grandfather of six.


SEVILLE, Gerenev, J., 90, St. Ambrose, Seymour, Nov. 25. Father of Kevin Seville. Great-grandmother of three. Great-grandmother of four.


KUEBEL, Phimina Martha, 76, Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Jeffersonville, Nov. 30. Father of Kevin Kuebel. Grandmother of three.


KUEBEL, Phimina Martha, 76, Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Jeffersonville, Nov. 30. Father of Kevin Kuebel. Grandmother of three.


KUEBEL, Phimina Martha, 76, Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Jeffersonville, Nov. 30. Father of Kevin Kuebel. Grandmother of three.


Bedford parish celebrates 150 years, reaches out to community

By Sean Gallagher

The Criterion   Friday, December 19, 2014
Christmas 2014

The Catholic population has never been dominant in Lawrence County. To this day, Catholics make up only approximately 4 percent of the southern Indiana county’s population. But throughout much of the 150-year history of St. Vincent de Paul Church in Bedford, the Catholic presence in Lawrence County have been prominent in the broader community from the pride they’ve taken in their beautiful limestone church to their outreach to all people in need.

“Their desire and hope and their love for God and the Church—plus their sacrifice of time, talent and treasure—has been rich and focused,” Father Richard Eldred, St. Vincent’s pastor since 2005. “It shows in the church building … and, more importantly, in the family of God.”

Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin gathered on Oct. 26 with Father Eldred, other priests who have served in the parish and many of its members to celebrate the 150th anniversary of its founding by celebrating a festive Mass and sharing a catered meal afterward. The Mass was celebrated in the parish’s church building, which was built in 1893 with limestone quarried in the local area. Known at the time as the “Cathedral of Southern Indiana,” it was designed by its then-pastor, Father John Bogemann, and featured stained-glass windows made in Belgium and purchased at the 1893 World’s Fair, Chicago.

Many members of the parish at the time worked in the local limestone industry and sculpted the church’s altar and Communion rail.

Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin celebrates Mass on Oct. 26 at St. Vincent de Paul Church in Bedford during a celebration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Bloomington Deanery faith community. Assisting at the Mass are Deacon David Reising, left, and Laran Tanney, master of ceremonies. Concelebrating at the Mass are Father Rick Eldred, pastor of the parish, Jesuit Father Jack Heims and Msgr. Frederick Easton. (Criterion photo)

God’s will made her the first Christian difference in their personal lives, in their communities they will serve.

As we reflect on the ethics surrounding new medical treatments and reproductive technologies, it can help us to recall the general principle, enshrined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, that the morality of a human act depends on three factors: the object, the end, and the circumstances involved. An act is morally good only if all three of these factors are morally good. If any one of them is bad, we recognize that the overall act itself becomes morally bad.

For example, a diva using her voice to sing a passage from a famous opera has the morally good object of performing a beautiful and artistic musical composition. The end for which a diva might sing would be to perfect her singing skills—also morally good. But if she decides to do it at 3 a.m. in a dormitory, so that it disturbs the sleep of her neighbors, then the circumstances would not be good, and we would conclude that the act of singing in that way by the diva, in fact, morally bad.

In the case of carrying out a womb transplant, the object of the act would be, namely, to restore a woman’s bodily wholeness by transplanting a healthy womb in circumstances where she lacks one. The end for which the womb transplant would be carried out would also be good, namely, to achieve a pregnancy. But particular circumstances can easily render the transplant immoral. If the transplant had been donated by a healthy woman still in her 30s, it would not be good, and the circumstances of the donor and recipient are crucial in discerning the ethical judgment.

A similar problem with the circumstances of the transplant could arise if the womb that was used for transplant had been donated by a healthy woman still in her reproductive years, who harbored a contraceptive intention and no longer desired to have more children of her own with her husband. In such a situation, her uterine donation would cause her to become sterile, and would represent a seriously flawed moral circumstance that would likewise render the action of receiving the transplanted womb unethical on the part of the other woman.

When might a womb transplant be morally acceptable? If a uterus were transplanted from either a deceased or a freely-consenting, post-menopausal woman to another woman whose ovaries, fallopian tubes and other reproductive tissues were then able to function so she could conceive a child within the marital embrace, rather than through IVF and assuming minimal medical risks to both donor and recipient, the womb transplant could represent an ethical means of resolving her uterine-fertility infertility.

In conclusion, the specific circumstances of both the donor and recipient are crucial in discerning the ethical appropriateness of this unusual procedure.

(Edward Taddei, Pacholczyk, Ph.D. earned his doctorate in neuroscience at Yale University and did post-doctoral work at Harvard University. He is a priest of the Diocese of Fall River, Mass., and serves as director of education at The National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia. See www.ncbcenter.org)
Saturday, December 27
St. John, Apostle and evangelist
1 John 2:1-4
Psalm 97:1-2, 5-6, 11-12
John 20:2-8

Sunday, December 28
The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph
Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14
or 1 Corinthians 13:1-12, 21-23
Psalm 128:1-5
or Psalm 105:1-6, 8-9
or Colossians 3:12-17
or Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19
Luke 2:22-40
or Luke 2:22, 39-40

Monday, December 29
St. Thomas Becket, bishop and martyr
1 John 2:3-11
Psalm 96:1-3, 5b-6
Luke 2:22-35

Tuesday, December 30
Sixth Day within the Octave of Christmas
1 John 2:12-17
Psalm 96:7-10
Luke 2:36-40

Wednesday, December 31
St. Sylvester I, pope
1 John 2:18-21
Psalm 96:1-2, 11-13
John 1:1-18

Thursday, January 1
The Octave Day of the Nativity of the Lord: Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God
Numbers 6:22-27
Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8
Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 2:16-21

Friday, January 2
St. Basil the Great, bishop and doctor of the Church
St. Gregory Nazianzen, bishop and doctor of the Church
1 John 2:22-28
Psalm 98:1-4
John 1:19-28

Saturday, January 3
The Most Holy Name of Jesus
1 John 2:29-36
Psalm 98:1, 3cd-4, 5-6
John 1:29-34

Sunday, January 4
The Epiphany of the Lord
Isaiah 60:1-6
Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13
Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6
Matthew 2:1-12

Monday, January 5
St. John Neumann, bishop
1 John 2:22-46
Psalm 2:7bc-8, 10-12a
Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25

Tuesday, January 6
St. André Bessette, religious
1 John 4:7-10
Psalm 72:1-4, 7-8
Mark 6:34-44

Wednesday, January 7
St. Raymond of Penyafort, priest
1 John 4:11-18
Psalm 72:1-2, 10, 12-13
Mark 6:45-52

Thursday, January 8
1 John 4:19-5:4
Psalm 72:1-2, 14, 15bc, 17
Luke 4:14-22a

Friday, January 9
1 John 5:3-13
Psalm 147:12-15, 19-20
Luke 3:12-16

Saturday, January 10
1 John 5:14-21
Psalm 149:1-6a, 9b
John 3:22-30

Sunday, January 11
The Baptism of the Lord
Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7
or Isaiah 55:1-11
Psalm 29:1-2, 3-4, 9-10
or (Response) Isaiah 12:2-3, 4bcd, 5-6
Acts 10:34-38
or 1 John 5:1-9
Mark 1:7-11

Count down to Christmas by counting your blessings, Pope Francis says

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—No saint was ever known for having a “funeral face,” Pope Francis said. The joy of knowing one is loved by God and saved by Christ must be seen at least in a sense of peace, if not a smile.

Celebrating the third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday, on Dec. 14, Pope Francis paid an evening visit to Rome’s St. Joseph Parish, meeting with the sick, with a group of Gypsies, with a first Communion class and with dozens of couples whose newborn babies were baptized in the past year.

“Be joyful as you prepare for Christmas,” he told them at Mass, urging as a first step that people thank God each day for the blessings they have been given.

A Christian’s Christmas joy has nothing to do with “the consumerism that leads to everyone being anxious [on] Dec. 24 because, ‘Oh, I don’t have this, I need that’—no, that is not God’s joy.”

With Christmas “less than 15 days away, no 13 days, let us pray. Don’t forget, we pray for Christmas joy. We give thanks to God for the many things he has given us and for faith, first of all.”

Earlier in the day, reciting the Angelus with visitors in St. Peter’s Square, Pope Francis blessed the statues of the Baby Jesus that will take center place in Nativity scenes in Rome schools, churches and homes. Addressing the children who brought their figurines to the square, the pope said, “When you pray in front of your creche at home, remember to pray for me, like I will remember you.”

At the end of the Angelus, volunteers distributed a little booklet, marked “gift of Pope Francis,” containing the texts of the Our Father and Hail Mary and other “traditional prayers,” as well as prayers drawn from the Psalms and the “five-finger prayer.” “Using the fingers on one hand, the prayer guides people in praying through a person’s face, he said, others find joy or at least peace shines through a person’s face, he said, others wonder why, opening the possibility of sharing with them the Gospel.”

A man holds a figure of the baby Jesus as Pope Francis leads the Angelus from the window of his studio overlooking St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican on Dec. 14. The pope blessed figurines of the baby Jesus held by people in the square. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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