

"Wait for the LORD, take courage;
be strong and take heart, wait for the LORD!"

(Ps. 27, 14)



RITE OF LECTOR

Diconate candidates **Christopher Conner** and **John Roth** received **Ministry of Lector** at a Mass celebrated by Bishop Mark Barchak on Saturday, October 1, 2016 at St. Bernard Church, Hastings. Pictured are Vickie and Christopher Conner, members of St. Bernard Church, Hastings; Bishop Mark; John and Lisa Roth; members of Most Holy Trinity, Huntingdon.

Take this book of holy Scripture and be faithful in handing on the word of God, so that it may grow strong in the hearts of His people.

-Prayer from the Institution of Lector

MARIAN FEASTS PREPARE THE WAY



Our Lady of Guadalupe

Advent begins this year on Sunday, November 27th. In the second week of Advent the church celebrates two beautiful Marian feasts, both of which point to the coming of Christ.

Tuesday, December 8th, is the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, which contrary to popular misunderstanding, is not about the virgin birth of Jesus. In 1854, Pope Pius IX dogmatically defined what the church had long believed and celebrated: that in her moment of conception, The Virgin Mary "was preserved free from all stain of original sin."

As with everything about Mary, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception ultimately points to Jesus, as one of the Mass prayers for the feast makes clear: "O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which you foresaw, so, through her intercession, we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence."

DIAKONIA

Advent Newsletter

November 2016



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"THE NATIVITY"

By Fra Filippo Lippi



WHAT IS ADVENT?

Advent is a time of waiting and preparing, both for the celebration of Jesus' birth at Christmas and for His second coming at the end of the world, when He "will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end," to quote the creed.

As we prepare to meet Jesus - both as the babe lying in a manger and as the glorious king of the universe - it may be helpful to reflect on the seasons and feasts that the church celebrates each December.

This special Advent issue of the *Diakonia* contains a collection of essays meant to help fully prepare you for the real meaning of Christmas.

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cleansed and admitted to your presence.

Monday, Dec. 12, is the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, called "Queen of Mexico" and "Patroness of the Americas." After Mary appeared to St. Juan Diego near Mexico City in 1531, her image is said to have miraculously appeared on his tilma, or cloak. It's noteworthy that in the image, the Blessed Virgin seems to be pregnant.

Eight Months Pregnant With God

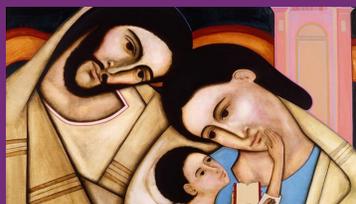
That's appropriate, because in Advent we are, in a sense, journeying with Mary through the final weeks of her pregnancy. Christmas is sometimes spoken of loosely as the feast of the Incarnation, but the Second Person of the Trinity actually took on our human nature nine months earlier, at the Annunciation (celebrated March 25).

Throughout the history of Christianity, many of the great heresies have rebelled against this central doctrine of the faith - that in Jesus Christ, Almighty God truly became a human being. Some people just couldn't swallow (or stomach) the idea that the utterly transcendent God would condescend to take on human flesh. It is, admittedly, an almost unbelievable claim - and it has some incredible implications, especially when we think about the 40 weeks before Jesus' birth.

It means that, for nine months, a teenage girl housed God in her body, and that God drew nourishment from her; that the omnipotent creator of the universe entered the world as a zygote, and that the eternal God was once a human fetus; that around this time a little more than 2,000 years ago the Virgin Mary was literally eight months pregnant with God.

And amid all the idealized imagery surrounding the Nativity, it's good to remember that the God Mary bore in her womb looked pretty much like what you might see in any modern prenatal ultrasound.

Finally, "the time came for her to have her child," and the God-baby was born in a stable. (Luke 2:6) The Gospels make no mention of animals, but they must have been there. That's one of the wonderful things about the Nativity: It was the kind of thing that even livestock could experience.



"The Presentation in the Temple"
By Michael D. O'Brien

Because the Christmas story is not just some feel-good fairy tale about peace, love and hope. It's about a real thing that really happened - a visible event in history. The Son of God really became a baby boy who really was born in a stable in Bethlehem, and his mother really "wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." (Luke 2:7)

Things can start to sound a bit fantastical when the visitors arrive - the humble shepherds, led by an army of angels; the mysterious magi, guided by a singular star. And the whole Christmas story risks becoming so familiar, the scene so gauzy and glowing in our imaginations, that it all begins to feel a bit remote, romantic, even unreal.

But the animals help ground us - there's nothing romantic or fantastic about them. They were just normal animals, doing normal animal-type things - eating, drinking, pooping - and unwittingly witnessing one of the greatest moments in the history of the world.

Will We Be As Bold As the Shepherds?

And how about those shepherds, who had been out in the fields keeping the night watch over their flock? As the Gospel of Luke tells us, when angels appeared to them to announce that a savior had been born, they were terrified.

But: "They went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds." (Luke 2:15-18)

We are in much the same position as the shepherds. We have heard the good news, and now the question is: What will we do with it? The shepherds left all they had to worship the newborn Lord. They risked being killed for their faith in the newborn Jesus. How do we respond?



"Advent at Ephesus"

By Benedictines of Mary, Queen of Apostles
Available at amazon.com

MAY HE REST IN PEACE



Deacon Herman Lux

Deacon Herman J. Lux, Johnstown passed away Friday, October 7, 2016. He was 79.

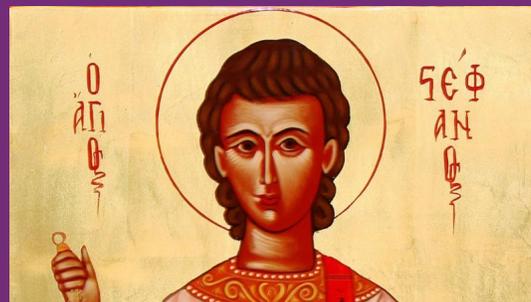
Born October 11, 1936 in Pittsburgh, son of Herman and Mildred (Salamon) Lux. Deacon Herman is survived by his loving wife of 60 years, Grace (Nicandro) Lux and these children, James (Paula Gritzer), Karen (fiancee, Ron Slezak), John (Karen Bantly), Joseph Lux, Herman (Laura Dyball), Richard (Emily Gojmerac), Kathleen (John Weeks), Thomas (Lisa Pfiel), Lisa (Darrell Bohannon), Grace (partner, Christy Hutchison), Maria (fiancee, John Hess), Michael (Melissa Hildebrand), Mark (Katie Benchoff); 23 grandchild and 6 great grandchildren.

A U.S. Navy veteran serving on the Air Craft Carrier USS Philippine Sea, Deacon Herman was employed as a rigger at Bethlehem Steel Corporation. He made seven trips to Honduras with Pro Nino and was Director of St. Andrew Food Pantry.

Deacon Herman was ordained in 1992. He served St. Mary Church in Nanty Glo, St. Joseph, Holy Spirit Church in Beavertdale-Dunlo, St. Mary in Pensacola, FL for eight years, where he was chaplain for the Mother of Mercy Legion of Mary and was currently serving as Senior Deacon at St. Andrew Church in Johnstown.

The Funeral Mass was celebrated Friday, October 14th at St. Andrew Church, Johnstown. Father Anthony Legarski, Celebrant; Father Angelo Patti, Concelebrant and Father Brian Warchola, Homilist.

**Eternal rest grant unto our Brother Herman, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon him.
May the souls of the faithful departed,
through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen**



St. Stephen the Martyr

The day after celebrating the birth of Jesus, the church marks the death of St. Stephen, the first person to be martyred for his faith in Christ. His death by stoning is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

The next day, Dec. 27, is usually the feast of St. John, who according to tradition was the only one of the Twelve Apostles not to be martyred (just plunged into boiling oil and exiled). John's Gospel is great reading for the

humiliation by sharing the strange message with others. Will we? Do we have the courage to live like the shepherds? It's an important question because, as the liturgical calendar immediately makes clear, the proclamation of the Gospel is often met with opposition.



THE ADVENT BOOK SHELF

[The Case for Jesus](#)

by Brant Pitre

[On the Family](#)

by Pope Francis

[Advent of the Heart](#)

by Alfred Delp, SJ

[Come, Lord Jesus: Meditations on the Art of Waiting](#)

by Mother Mary Francis, P.C.C.

[Maiden and Mother: Devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary Throughout the Year](#)

by Margaret R. Miles

[Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives](#)

by Pope Benedict XVI

[The World's First Love: Mary Mother of God](#)

by Venerable Fulton J. Sheen

[Advent and Christmas with Thomas Merton](#)

by Thomas Merton

[A Coming Christ in Advent: Essays on the Gospel Narratives](#)

[Preparing for the Birth of Jesus - Matthew 1 and Luke 1](#)

by Raymond E. Brown S.S.

[An Advent Source Book](#)

by Thomas O'Gorman

plunged into boiling oil and exiled). John's Gospel is great reading for the Christmas season, even though he wrote no infancy narrative. Instead, John illuminated the significance of Jesus' birth, putting into words the incomprehensible fact of the Incarnation. His Gospel famously begins, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." (*John 1:1,14*) There's enough substance and mystery in those few words for a lifetime of prayer and reflection.

"Take courage, I have conquered the world"

As we come to the end of the month, the first Sunday after Christmas is the feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, whose experience should put to rest the popular "prosperity gospel" message that if you try to follow God's will, things will go well for you in this world. Never did a group of people more perfectly follow God - the least holy among them is still the patron saint of the universal church! - and yet, even for this most holy of families, things rarely went well.

They got off to a rough start when Mary turned up pregnant with a child that was not Joseph's - a crisis averted only by angelic intervention. Nine months later, Mary had to give birth in a barn. Then an evil king plotted to murder the baby Jesus, forcing the family to flee the country. The only other episode from Jesus' childhood recorded in the Gospels involved Mary and Joseph panicking after they lost him for the better part of a week. Joseph died while Mary was still young. And then Mary had to watch as her only son was tortured and unjustly executed in the most brutal, humiliating way imaginable.

No, things were never easy for the Holy Family. That's because holiness has nothing to do with an easy life, except perhaps to militate against it. If we are truly striving to follow God, we should be prepared to face tough decisions, difficult circumstances, mockery, persecution and even death. If the Holy Family could not escape such trials, why should we?

That may seem like a rather gloomy way to wrap up a reflection on the Nativity, but the seasons of Advent and Christmas remind us that the sufferings of this world - even death itself - no longer have the last word. For in the birth of Jesus, God has invaded our world, and by his life, death and resurrection he has opened for us the gates of heaven and purchased for us the rewards of eternal life.

On Christmas night, the cry of the Christ Child heralds the promise that will be fulfilled on Easter morning:

***"In the world you will have trouble,
but take courage, I have conquered the world."***

(*John 16:33*)

ADVENT QUICK LINKS



Catholic Online

<http://www.catholic.org>

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

www.usccb.org

Catholic Relief Services

www.crsfairtrade.org/advent

Sacred Space

Your Daily Prayer Online

www.sacredspace.ie

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