

Reflections on the Turn of a New Year



As I write, I'm sitting in my Aunt's kitchen (she lives on the side of a hill near Park City in Utah), trying to think on whether or not there's anything worth commenting on as we prepare to mark the passing of 2021 and we strive to peer around the corner into 2022. You may laugh at the thought that I am struggling to put some words together, as we all well know I'm not usually stuck for something to say. The greater truth is that following the Christmas rush, this rural retreat is a place of great peace and tranquility, and my mind is just resting. Nonetheless, life continues and even though it might seem far removed from me in this place, I

know that as I return to Northridge this evening, the pace will pick up in a blink of an eye.

Life Unfolds, Grace Blesses

If I needed any reminders that life continues apace, even while far removed from my usual routine, I received word from my best friend from seminary that his father has just passed away. Fr. Jerry serves in the Diocese of Port Elizabeth in South Africa, and I strongly encouraged him to get back home to be with his family and ailing father just as the Omicron variant was breaking onto the world scene with travel lockdowns once again being put in place. By the grace of God, Jerry made it home to be with family, quarantined for ten days, and got to spend time with his father in his final days.

Then the following day another friend from home sent pictures of her newborn son, Macdara James Duffy, who entered the world at a healthy 8lbs 3oz. Mom and baby are thriving, thank God, and the miracle of new life continues to bless us all.

My prayer for Mr. Browne passing into eternal life, is for eternal rest, and for his family, peace after a long period of care for their dad. My prayer for baby Macdara is a life of blessing and joy, and for his parents whom he will stretch. All that transpires between the moment of our birth and the moment of our passing is opportunity for grace. My prayer for all of us, at the turning of the year, is for hope, healing, and peace in 2022.

Man proposes, God disposes - Covid and Church

During our Christmas liturgies in church this year, I mentioned how wonderful it was to see so many faces in Church. It was a stark contrast to last Christmas which was streamed with a small few parishioners present and assisting in the church.

When I look back at the past year, I never anticipated that we would still be dealing with Covid as part of our ongoing experience. Yet here we are. Vaccinations have been rolled out. Public health guidance from county, state and national entities has adapted and changed as the landscape of our pandemic experience has evolved.

Perhaps like many of you, the development of vaccines, their roll-out, and their availability gave rise to my hope that we would wrest control of our lives back from this pandemic. Getting to eat out, and my first visit to the movies were reassuring. Then my hopes were tempered as variants with Greek alphabet names such as Delta and Omicron continue to ensure our care and our ways of living are impacted.

We reopened our Church building for liturgy last March while taking all manner of precautions and care to ensure, as best we could, a relatively safe place for our gathering. We invested in upgrades to our A/C filters, made hand-sanitizer available, and sanitized the building between liturgies. Together with this, social distancing and masking on the part of worshippers went a long way to creating an environment in which people felt comfortable gathering.

Our efforts to build back our worship experience were gradual and progressive, adapting to the guidance we received from local public health authorities and the Archdiocese. Our care and our collective efforts seem to have served us well, as we have avoided any church-related outbreaks of Covid.

I had every hope that by September last we would be back to our old schedule, but as the old Robert Burns saying goes... "The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry." So we continue to look forward with hope and faith, even as the Omicron variant is sweeping through the Southland. Current realities suggest that covid-related adaptations to our lives will be ongoing for some time.

Not long before the Christmas we had cause, in the rectory, to undergo testing because of one of us being identified as a "close contact". Looking back, I was most grateful that testing was available for us. I heard the other day from a colleague in ministry in another church here in the valley that they had to cancel all services this weekend because of a positive covid result. For the time being, it appears that in the ordinary course of our living, both home and lab testing joins our habits of masking and social distancing.

With God's help, once again our collective efforts will bear fruit, and we will move through this stage of our experience living with this pandemic.

(Not Quite) The Adventures of Mollie Loftus



Since we resumed services in Church last March, and I resumed writing weekly in the parish bulletin, quite a number of people have expressed their disappointment with the sunsetting of the weekly email. I am still hopeful that the New Year might see a resumption of some form of monthly email communication for those who wish to receive it. However, comments suggest that the real reason people are missing the weekly emails is that they miss news of my niece's antics. Molly and Anna have been growing and getting on with life. Mollie started "big school" in September, and Anna got her feet under herself and is literally running everyone to

exhaustion. Once again, by God's grace, these youngest members of my family are a sign of vitality and a witness to the love of God in our world.

Mollie's schooldays have been complicated with the occasional required tests for Covid as classmates were found to be positive. Gratefully, she is healthy and well, and loves being at school. Her teachers find her a most pleasant child to teach, and I couldn't help but share my brother and sister-in-law's pride when they reported that her teacher commented that the classroom simply brightens up whenever Mollie walks in. She is quite the little girl now, and has left far behind any semblance of her infant years.



Anna, by the same token, has fully embraced the role of the family infant. Her personality is very different from her older sister's. She worships the ground Mollie walks on, tracking her every movement whenever they're together, and imitating her in all manner of ways. She is developing a very strong and determined personality, and shares a smile to melt the Arctic ice-cap as it suits her.



Together, both Mollie and Anna continue to steal the hearts of their extended family, at all times reminding us of the blessings that are ours in the person of these two little ones. Individually, these young ones are quite a handful. Together, they are a joy, even as they give everyone a proverbial run for their money.

I can't help but reflect on the experience of Mary and Joseph as Jesus grew under their care and supervision. As we listen to the scriptures during these days of the Christmas season, we are given all manner of glimpses into the tremendous significance of the Incarnation, and the enfleshing of God's blessings in our lives. The travails of Mary and Joseph attested to in the gospels, the growing Jesus separated from his parents and being found in the Temple, and other stories in the gospels, remind me that being born into this world can be messy and erratic. For millennia now, theologians and people of faith have often wondered if God could have saved humanity without all the challenges attendant upon the experiences of being human. My sense, and the perspective of many others, is that God could have chosen to make our salvation real in any way God deemed fit. But for some reason, God deigned that Incarnation was the best way for salvation to unfold.

Concluding 2021, Opening 2022

Incarnation is messy. It is complicated. It is ever-ready to birth grace into our world. We might wish that so much of our lives were different, especially as we consider the challenges that 2021 brought with it for us. Looking into 2022, I would invite us all to greet the New Year and whatever it brings, with an openness of heart, and a remembrance of the faithfulness of God who blesses us.

Gratitude



Finally, on a personal note, I must express my deep, deep gratitude to all our parishioners who have been so supportive of Fr. Jerry, Msgr. Peter, Fr. Fili and myself this past year. The moral, spiritual and material support that has been shared with each of us individually, and with the parish, has been an occasion of profound blessing which I absolutely cannot go without acknowledging as we slip from 2021 into 2022.

May we commend 2021 to God's mercy, and pray that 2022 will be a year filled with blessings of hope, joy and peace for all of us.

Know of my continued loving prayer for you and for your dear ones in these days.

God bless and keep you all.

Fr. David