

THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY FAMILY

COLUMBUS, GA

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DECEMBER 2016

Altar Society Prepares Our Church Environment

Advent and Christmas are two of the most important seasons of our liturgical year. Here at Holy Family, the members of the Altar Society decorate the church in order to enhance the beauty of these seasons. Through their care and attention to detail, we are able to worship in a space that physically reminds us of what we're celebrating.

First, the Altar Society is in charge of setting up the church's Advent wreath. Maria Laroque, a longtime member of the Altar Society, notes how the Advent wreath is an important symbol of the season.

"The word 'advent' comes from the Latin *adventus*, which means 'coming,'" she says. "An Advent wreath is placed in the sanctuary with five candles – three purple, one pink and one white. Advent is the time to renew our faith in the Lord. The wreath and its prayers provide us with a way to augment this special preparation for Christmas.

"The purple candles represent prayer, penance and sacrifices undertaken during this time," she says. "The pink candle is lit on the third Sunday, which is Gaudete Sunday. This is the Sunday of rejoicing in the arrival of



the midpoint of Advent, and that we are close to Christmas. The fifth candle is placed in the middle of the wreath. The white reminds us that Jesus is the spotless lamb of God sent to wash away our sins. All five candles are lit on Christmas."

On the day before Christmas, the seven members of the Altar Society get together to decorate the whole church.

"Decorating the church is a Christmastime tradition – we look forward to decorating it!" Maria says. "This involved putting a white altar cloth on the altar, renewing the candles, setting up the Nativity scene, and putting up Christmas trees and red and white poinsettias.

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Being a Good *Christmas* Steward

The Christmas season is fast approaching. We have already made our gift lists, and perhaps even checked them twice. First on the list is family, followed by friends, our children's teachers and coaches, and maybe even the mailman. Christmas inspires us to give our family and friends gifts of love and appreciation, in gratitude towards all they do for us during the year. The very idea of holiday gift giving – a display of love and gratefulness to those who have touched our lives – is parallel to the concept of stewardship. When we give to God, we are effectively saying “thanks” for all He has done for us.

Think of all God has done for you this year. How have His loving arms embraced you? Maybe He has answered a special prayer intention. Maybe He has created a job opportunity for an unemployed loved one. He may have helped safely bring a new baby into the family, or instilled peace during a particularly difficult time. God's blessings are countless, and the abundant gifts He bestows upon us are given freely out of incomprehensible love – despite our unworthiness.

Think of the ways you respond to God's bountiful blessings. How do you choose to show Him your thankfulness? As we prepare for the coming of Christ

during Advent, will we remember to add Jesus' name to our list? Uncle John wants a new drill, and Grandpa definitely needs a new cardigan – but what does Jesus want? It is His birthday we are celebrating, after all.

The very first name on the list – above our spouse, children, relatives, and friends – should be God's name. As disciples of Christ, we are called to give God our “first fruits,” not our leftovers. We should joyfully place God first on our gift-giving lists, not out of guilt or as an afterthought, but out of love and appreciation.

Stewardship allows us to tangibly give a Christmas gift to God through our time, talent and treasure. We give God gifts of time through prayer, such as spending time before the Blessed Sacrament or praying the Rosary. We can give our talents to God by way of simple charitable actions, such as bringing a meal to a hard-pressed neighbor, or watching a young mother's children so that she is able to prepare for her own family's Christmas celebration. And as for treasure, we can give God a portion of our income this Christmas by dropping an extra dollar in the collection basket. Whatever choices you make this season, make the decision to be a good Christmas steward.

As we prepare for the coming of Christ during Advent, will we remember to add Jesus' name to our list? Uncle John wants a new drill, and Grandpa definitely needs a new cardigan – but what does Jesus want? It is His birthday we are celebrating, after all.



A Letter From Our Pastor

Advent: Moving Toward a Time of Fulfilled Hope

Dear Parishioners,

There is never a time during the year when we cannot pause and reflect on who and what we are and how we conduct our lives, both as a parish and as people of God. But this time of year in particular lends itself to just that.

Advent is often called “a season of hope.” However, it is more than that. We have choices and decisions to make at this time. This is the time when we must acknowledge the need for us to change attitudes and to welcome the light of Christ’s presence. In this way, we can contribute to bringing hope to a world that is starved for hope.

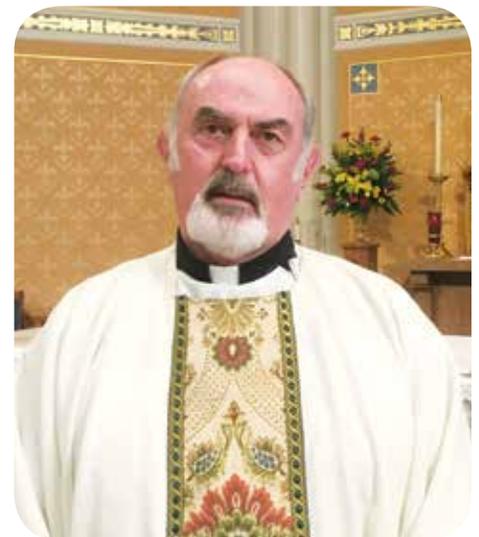
Of course, we approach this time of year with a spirit of confident expectation, but now is the time for us to be awake to Christ, Whose presence is revealed as forgiveness, Whose peace reconciles our differences, and Whose hope should strengthen and lift up our hearts.

We have pointed out that each and every day is an opportunity for a new beginning. Our new Church liturgical year began on the First Sunday of Advent. We understand that Advent is a time of preparation

for the celebration of the Nativity of our Lord – Christmas – but I would remind you that it is much more than that for us Catholics and Christians.

It is a time for us to prepare for Christ’s Second Coming, as well. Much of what we do, our Scripture readings, our prayers, our traditions are built on that reality. One of the traditions in our Church and in many of our homes is an Advent wreath. That custom is filled with meaning. The wreath tends to be circular in shape with four candles – three purple and one rose. The color purple is very evident at this time of year, just as it is during Lent. Purple represents prayer, penance, sacrifice, and good works.

On the Third Sunday of Advent, though, we light the rose candle. That is Gaudete Sunday, a day of rejoicing. Throughout Advent, the candles are lit in progression each week. This builds on the idea of expectation and hope that we may see as Christ’s first coming into the world, but we must also keep in mind that, at the same time, we are anticipating His Second Coming. We cannot ask ourselves often enough, “Are we ready?” Jesus



and St. Paul and others remind us often that we do not and cannot know the time and the place.

The point is that the time is now for us. Yes, this is a time of hope, but we are heading toward a time of fulfilled hope. God bless you and yours at this special time of year.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Dan O’Connell
Pastor



The Lasting Legacy of



Phillipa McGee Brown originated the tradition of family Advent wreath making here at Holy Family. The ministry has become a lasting legacy of her strong faith life.

Parishioners are invited to come make Advent wreaths in St. Joseph Hall at 4 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 26, and between the two Masses on Sunday, Nov. 27. Volunteers are always welcome to help with set-up – beginning at 10 a.m. on Saturday, Nov. 26 – or to help cut the greenery or make bows! Just call CCW president Kay Jenkins at 706-289-3632.

The Phillipa Brown A

As a member of Holy Family, you may already be familiar with our Advent wreath-making tradition. Every year during the first weekend of Advent, the Council of Catholic Women, or CCW, invites our parish families to gather together to create beautiful evergreen wreaths that help keep the Advent spirit alive in our hearts and homes. What everyone may not know is that this wonderful tradition is a lasting legacy of one woman's inspiring faith. Phillipa McGee Brown began the Advent wreath tradition here at Holy Family in 1999, through a ministry for young families that was called the Circle of Friends. Although Phillipa, her husband, and three children had moved to Pine Mountain and were members of Christ the King at the time of her passing in 2015, the memory of her strong faith and devotion to the church lives on at Holy Family as we continue to carry on this holiday tradition.

Melanie Smizawski, an active member and past president of the CCW, is grateful for this special gift that Phillipa brought to our parish.

"The Advent wreath-making tradition allows families to be able to prepare for Christmas in a more spiritual way than the worldly way of commercialism," she says. "Advent is not just about a countdown to the gifts, and this is a way to recognize the preparation for the coming of Christ into our lives."

Parishioners are invited to gather to make Advent wreaths before the 5 p.m. Saturday Mass or between the two Sunday Masses during the first weekend of Advent Nov. 26-27. The CCW furnishes all supplies needed to create these beautiful wreaths, including fresh greenery, foam forms, floral pins, ribbons, candle cups, and candles.

of One Faithful Soul

Advent Wreath Tradition at Holy Family

They also provide prayer booklets for families to take home with their wreaths.

Over the years, Melanie has been touched by the generosity parishioners have shown toward this ministry.

“We provide all of the supplies, but something we’ve done in the past couple of years is put out a jar for donations, and people have been so generous that we have really been surprised – we’ve been shocked, actually,” she says. “People are just really so thankful to be able to do this activity, and all of those donations go right back into the CCW treasury and will be used for charitable giving or supply purchase again.”

Last year, the CCW chose to honor Phillipa in a special way by making a prayer card in her memory that they gave out to the families who came to make wreaths. The card included a photo of Phillipa and prayer for her peace, and

recognized her for originating the wreath-making tradition at Holy Family through the Circle of Friends Ministry.

“It was special because we were able to remember her, we were able to touch the people that she had been friends with, and we were able to recall the ministry that she had been a part of,” Melanie says. “I know that we impacted even her father, who had also lost his wife not long before. One of the former Circle of Friends members took an Advent wreath to him. So it was really a special year for this tradition last year.”

Thanks to the inspiring faith and initiative of one woman, Holy Family has been blessed with a tradition that brings our parish families an opportunity to better prepare for the Advent season while enjoying wonderful fellowship with fellow parishioners. It is truly amazing to see what a touching legacy can be left to us by even one faithful soul!

Altar Society Prepares Our Church Environment *continued from front cover*

“Epiphany is on Jan. 6,” she adds. “We have three camels and three wise men, and I put them on the side during the Christmas season to show that they are coming. Then on Jan. 6, I put them in front of the baby Jesus with the gifts.”

Maria greatly enjoys decorating the church for Christmas, and feels that she has grown closer to God in her many years as a member of the Altar Society.

“It is rewarding and fulfilling to see the completion of our work,” she says. “I also enjoy it because I feel like I am doing something for the Lord, and that is fulfilling in itself. For me, personally, Midnight Mass is my favorite part of Christmas. The real meaning of Christmas, away from all the hustle and bustle, is rejoicing in this beautiful feast – the birth of our savior.”

If you would like to get involved in the Altar Society, please contact Maria Laroque at 706-321-0446.



December 8:

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception

When it comes to Catholic trivia, there is one simple question that often evokes an incorrect response: “What is the Immaculate Conception?”

More often than not, this term is believed to designate Christ’s conception within Mary, through the power of the Holy Spirit. A good guess, no doubt. But it is 100 percent incorrect!

The term “Immaculate Conception” describes the state of Mary’s soul within the womb of her mother, St. Anne. It has nothing to do with a special type of generative conception by her parents – Mary’s body was formed in the usual manner by her mother and father.

Instead, the term “Immaculate Conception” describes how Mary was preserved from the stain of original sin from the first moment of her existence.

Every person since Adam and Eve has been born with the stain of original sin, which can be washed away in the cleansing waters of Baptism. Yet, this fallen state never touched the soul of Mary, the new Eve. She was conceived with original sanctity and innocence, escaping all faults, depraved emotions and passions, and remained sinless. She was not exempt from the temporal penalties of Adam, however – including sorrow, physical illness and death.

The belief in Mary’s Immaculate Conception has been held by the Church throughout history, though only officially declared a dogma in 1854 by Pope Pius IX. Highly devoted to the Blessed Virgin, Pius IX hoped the official definition would draw emphasis to the already existing belief, thereby inspiring deeper devotion to Mary. This dogma finds its roots in both Scripture and Tradition, and remains consistent with reason and the teachings of our early Church fathers.

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception is celebrated every year on Dec. 8 and is one of the few



declared Holy Days of Obligation on the Church calendar. All Catholics are obligated to attend Mass on this day.

Why not make this liturgical feast a special day of devotion? Bring a rose to place before an image of the Blessed Virgin in the church sanctuary, or arrange a little altar at home for your children to decorate. Recite the Magnificat and discuss the Church’s teaching on the Immaculate Conception.

Once this beautiful feast is brought alive in our hearts and in our homes, we will never again mistakenly answer that

“tricky” question: “What is the Immaculate Conception?”

The Magnificat

**My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for He has looked with favor on His lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is His Name.
He has mercy on those who fear Him
in every generation.
He has shown the strength of His arm,
He has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich He has sent away empty.
He has come to the help of His servant Israel
for He remembered His promise of mercy,
the promise He made to our fathers,
to Abraham and His children for ever.**

Advent: A Time of Preparation to Receive Christ on Christmas

Though we tend to associate this time of year with the frantic purchasing of gifts and preparations for family gatherings, the liturgical season of Advent is much less about material gifts, and more about spiritually preparing ourselves for the birth of Christ. It is an opportunity for each one of us to refocus ourselves on what life is all about – coming before our Incarnate Lord in worship and thanksgiving. It is a time to reflect upon the countless gifts that have been given to us and also to give back in selfless love to others.

“Advent is the time for preparation for Christmas,” Fr. Dan O’Connell says. “During this time of year, the readings and the Sundays of Advent are all focusing on the coming of the Messiah, celebrating His coming in history and anticipating His second coming in Glory.”

Helping us stay focused on the true meaning of the season, various opportunities are made available here at Holy Family to help us reflect and prepare. This year, each family will be offered a copy of the book, *The Christmas Countdown: Creating 25 Days of New Advent Traditions for Families*, inviting them to reflect and pray together at home. The book contains Scripture passages, reflections, and activities that provide a deeper understanding of Advent.

“We know that Advent is a time to prepare, but oftentimes the stress of the more commercial aspects of the holiday threaten to overtake the opportunity to be open to the spiritual – which usually involves stillness and quiet,” says Director of Religious Education Julie Hird.

It is also one of the traditions of the season to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation as we prepare spiritually to receive Christ at Christmas. The Deanery Penance Service will be offered for all who would like to receive this sacrament during Advent. By making time

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Advent is a time of year when we are invited to refocus on what life is all about – coming before our Incarnate Lord in worship and thanksgiving.





THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY FAMILY

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Weekend Mass

Saturday Vigil

5:00 p.m. Mass

Sunday

8:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.

Daily Mass

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday

12:10 p.m. Mass

Reconciliation

Saturday

4:00 p.m.

Advent: A Time of Preparation to Receive Christ on Christmas *continued from page 7*

for confession during this season, not only do we offer contrition for the times we have fallen short, but we also make room to receive God's saving grace in our hearts. This year's service will be offered at St. Anne's, 2000 Kay Circle in Columbus, on Monday, Dec. 5, from 7-9 p.m.

"I invite all of us to open our hearts to each other and to the Lord's presence in each other as we enter into the Advent season," Father says.

As we prepare for Christmas, please consider joining the parish in celebrating Advent or spending some extra time at home entering into the spirit of Advent.

Please see the bulletin for more information, or contact our parish office at 706-323-6908.

Christmas Mass Schedule

Christmas Eve, Saturday
4 pm, 6pm and Midnight

Christmas Day, Sunday
10am

