

Born during the First World War, Sister Carolyn (*center*), 99, and Sister Bridget (*right*), 96, have each served for more than 70 years as members of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Sister Elizabeth Mary (*left*), 79, is not far behind at 60 years of service. Together, they have spent over 200 years in religious life, sharing their time, their faith, their love—sharing all they have.

Please give to those who have given a lifetime.

Retirement Fund for Religious

Never counting the cost, Sisters Elizabeth Mary, Carolyn, and Bridget—and some 35,000 senior sisters, brothers, and religious order priests like them—have offered their lives in service to others. Many worked for years for small stipends, leaving their religious communities without adequate savings for retirement and eldercare.

Your gift to the Retirement Fund for Religious provides funding for prescription medications, nursing care, and more. Please be generous.

Over 93 percent of donations aid senior religious.

www.retiredreligious.org

To give at your parish: Make your check payable to your parish. (Put RFR on the memo line.)

To donate by mail: Make your check payable to Retirement Fund for Religious. Please do not mail cash.

Please check with your employer about matching gifts.

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National Religious Retirement Office

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Nacidas durante la I Guerra Mundial, la Hna. Carolyn (centro), 99, y la Hna. Bridget (derecha), 96, cada una ha servido durante más de 70 años como miembro del Apostolado del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús. La Hna. Elizabeth Mary (izquierda), 79, no se queda atrás con 60 años de servicio. Juntas, han pasado más de 200 años en la vida religiosa, compartiendo su tiempo, su fe, su amor –compartiendo todo lo que tienen.

Done a los que donaron su vida.

Fondo para la Jubilación de Religiosos

Sin contar nunca el costo, las Hnas. Elizabeth Mary, Carolyn y Bridget –y 35 mil hermanas, hermanos y sacerdotes de órdenes religiosas ancianos como ellas– han ofrecido su vida en servicio a los demás. Muchos han trabajado durante años recibiendo salarios bajos, lo cual ha dejado a sus comunidades religiosas sin ahorros suficientes para su jubilación y sus

cuidados geriátricos. Su donativo al Fondo para la Jubilación de Religiosos proporciona fondos para recetas médicas, enfermeros y más. Sean generosos.

Más del 93 por ciento de los donativos ayuda a los religiosos ancianos.

www.retiredreligious.org

Para entregarlo a su parroquia: Haga su cheque pagadero a su parroquia. (Ponga RFR en la línea del Memo.)

Para donar por correo: Haga su cheque pagadero a Retirement Fund for Religious. No envíe efectivo.

Verifique con su empleador los donativos paralelos.

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December 2014

Dear St. Cecilia Families & Supporters,

The Our Faith, Our Children, Our Future School Tuition Organization awarded nearly \$4.1 million in 2014 in need-based tuition grants to almost 3,200 students, representing over 32% of the students attending Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Dubuque. At St. Cecilia School we received \$57,218 to assist 45 students. Families are eligible for STO assistance if their taxable income is at or below 300% of the federal poverty rate for the previous tax year.

The STO grants are made possible through the support of hundreds of donors across the Archdiocese. These donors not only receive the satisfaction of helping thousands of students, but also receive an Iowa income tax credit equal to 65% of their total donation. In addition, their entire gift is eligible for federal income tax deductibility. The goal for the 2014 tax year is \$5.7 million.

I am personally asking you, as a school and parish leader to consider a gift to this program. It is so important that we are able to count you among those who show support for this program at our school. Donor applications, as well as a complete explanation of the program are available at www.ourfaithsto.org.

This program benefits not only our school, but the entire Archdiocese. Please support and share this program with others. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Ervin A. Rowlands
Principal

Growing in FAITH™

Discovering **hope and joy** in the Catholic faith.

December 2014

St. Cecilia Church

Rev. James L. Secora, Pastor

One Minute Meditations

St. Nicholas

Legends abound about this saint but we know that he was orphaned at a young age when his wealthy parents died. Generous to a fault, he reportedly threw money down a chimney to enable a poor man's daughters to marry. This is the image that makes him the model for Santa Claus. As bishop of Lycia (now Turkey), he fought against heresies plaguing the Church in the fourth century. He was devoted to charity and the protection of the weak.



Pray for peace

In the midst of your celebration of Christ's birth, please pray that all nations will come to respect life from conception to natural death.

Believing vs. understanding

When Mary heard she would give birth to the Son of God, she didn't understand but trusted anyway, "Be it done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). She knew that we don't have to understand to believe that God can do the impossible.



Give as God gave at Christmas

We give because God gave. God gave us his son, so every December we imitate him by giving gifts to our loved ones. What about gifts for God?

God gave the gift of himself. God was the first Christmas gift, lying in a manger. In his image, we are called to give the gift of ourselves to him. Go to Mass every Sunday and in between, too. Kneel in adoration before the tabernacle or in a Perpetual Adoration chapel. Go to Confession to stay connected.

Give the gift of love. God loves freely whether or not we love in return. He asks us to share love with others. Give others your undivided attention. Put down the cellphone in meetings,

in conversations, and definitely at Mass. Listen when someone has a problem. Put people before things.

Give the gift of prayer. Are your

prayers like a letter to Santa - lists of wants and needs? God already knows all that. Instead, pray for friends or loved ones who aren't active in their faith. Offer Rosaries for those who are sick. Ask God for guidance and thank him for his goodness.

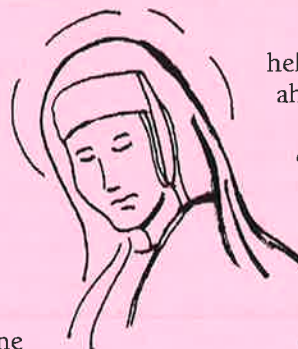
Give the gift of help. Don't forget your parish where God's work is done. Help clean the church, teach a class, shovel snow, support a ministry. Without you, God's work won't get done.



Why Do Catholics Do That?

Why do Catholics say Mary was born without Original Sin?

The Catechism teaches that God gave Mary all the gifts necessary for her to become mother of our Savior. In fact, when the angel Gabriel addressed Mary as "full of grace" in Luke 1:28, he means that Mary had the special divine



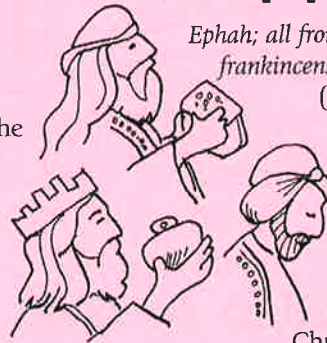
help necessary for the task ahead.

While we are cleansed of original sin at Baptism, Pope Pius IX infallibly affirmed that Mary's role in Jesus' work was so crucial that it kept her from original sin at the outset.

Christmas is our epiphany

"Epiphany" is defined as a sudden revelation or insight. The celebration we call "The Epiphany" commemorates the moment when three foreign kings visited the newborn Jesus and experienced the revelation that he was a divine king.

The visit of the Magi was prophesied in the Old Testament. "The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts, the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute. All kings shall pay him homage, all nations shall serve him" (Psalm 72:10-11). "Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and



Ephah; all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the Lord"

(Isaiah 60:6). St. Matthew recorded that they brought three gifts: gold – the gift for a king, frankincense – the gift for a priest, and myrrh – a burial ointment.

The kings witnessed to the presence of the Messiah on Earth, and the fulfillment of God's promise of a Savior. Christmas is our reminder that God is always faithful.

Christmas is our epiphany into God's eternal love.

from Scripture

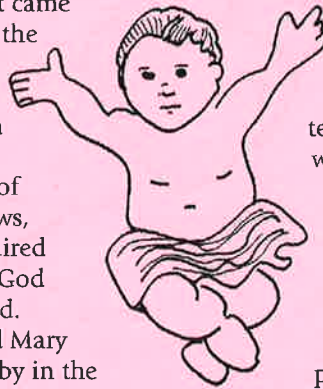
Luke 2:22-40, Look for the Lord

To the uninformed observer, Jesus' birth was unremarkable and his family quite ordinary. When it came time to present him in the temple, his parents couldn't afford the customary offering of a lamb and gave two pigeons as an offering of the poor. As faithful Jews, they did what was required by their faith to thank God for the gift of their child.

Yet, when Joseph and Mary presented their new baby in the temple, Simeon immediately recognized him as the Messiah. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he

prophesied that Jesus was to be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel."

Simeon was not alone in recognizing the Lord in the temple. Anna was also filled with the Holy Spirit. Her faith in God's promises gave her hope. The hope God places in our hearts gives us a desire for the kingdom of Heaven. The Holy Spirit reveals the presence of the Lord to those who want to know him, to receive him, and to be with him forever.



Feasts & Celebrations

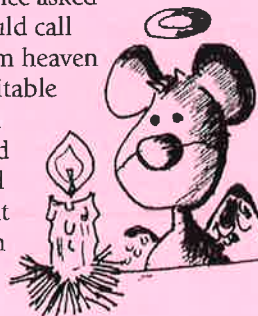
December is when we prepare for and celebrate Christ's birth and the miraculous events surrounding it.

December 8 – Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On this Holy Day of Obligation, we attend Mass to commemorate that Mary was conceived in St. Anne's womb without original sin.

December 12 - Our Lady of Guadalupe (1531). The Blessed Mother appeared to St. Juan Diego, also Native American. She asked to have a chapel built for her, and had him carry roses in

his tilma (cape) to the bishop as a sign. When he emptied his tilma before the bishop, it retained the image of the Blessed Mother.

December 27 – St. John (1st century). An apostle and friend of Jesus, St. John was known for his fiery temper. He once asked Jesus if he could call down fire from heaven on an inhospitable town. Later in his life, he and St. Peter asked the Holy Spirit to come down on the Samaritans.



Q & A How long does the Christmas season last?

The Church's real Christmas season starts on Christmas Day and lasts until the Baptism of Our Lord.



By celebrating the whole season, you can make your Christmas joy last long after you've taken down the tree. Here are some highlights of the season:

Feast of the Holy Family, December 28th. Gather for a special meal with family or make contact with out-of-town relatives.

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, January 1st. Dedicate a special rosary to the Blessed Mother asking her to help you grow in love and trust.

The Epiphany, January 4th. The example of the Magi honoring Jesus has become a symbol of sharing him with the world. This is our chance to think about the way we live so that we can better reveal Christ to our world.

The Baptism of Our Lord, January 11th. Baptism is our entry into the Kingdom. Take time this day to renew your Baptismal vows and decide what you can change in your life to help you live as Christ did.

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SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT



Source of All Kindness

Father of all comfort and consolation,
in this holy season,
as you speak tenderly to us,
teach us to speak tenderly to
the hopeless
with acts of care and service.
Make us heralds of your Good News
preparing your way with just deeds
and repentant hearts
that answer the call of John the Baptist.
May your Church be a sign of your love,
ready for the Lord who is to come,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Sunday, December 7, 2014
Prepare the Way of the Lord



Today's Readings: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; Psalm 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14; 2 Peter 3:8-14; Mark 1:1-8. In today's readings, the Gospel echoes the reading from Isaiah. John the Baptist is the messenger crying out for people to prepare for the Lord. We see that John has completely centered his life on his mission to ready the people for the Messiah. He has only one aim: to point the way to the Lord through repentance. He makes no claim for himself, asserting that he is not worthy to loosen the man's sandals. For nourishment, he only takes in locusts and honey.

The message that John delivers is the "good tidings" to which Isaiah refers. The Savior is coming, John cries out from the desert, as the prophet predicted. But why does God send the Savior? Isaiah tells us that the Savior is coming because God "will feed his flock like a shepherd." God is

merciful and seeks to gather his lambs. When the Savior comes, God's glory will be revealed, and as Isaiah says, "all people shall see it together."

This concept of "all people" appears to be as central to today's readings as repentance. Peter insists that the Lord wants "all to come to repentance." The Lord does not want one of his lambs left to stray. It is obvious that God calls and saves us as a people. The prophet Isaiah cried out to the nation, and John the Baptist did likewise. The Church continues to call to the People of God to live, as Peter states, in "holiness and godliness." During this Advent, how will you repent to form your life into one of holiness and devotion? The Church gives us this time to strive to be, as Peter says, "without spot or blemish."



THIS WEEK AT HOME

Monday, December 8, 2014

Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Today we celebrate the Patronal Feast day of the United States of America. Mary's faith and model of discipleship could be honored in many ways today. A simple way might be to place flowers by an image of her. Pope John Paul II referred to the "school of Mary." Consider what Mary's "yes" to God can teach about courage in answering God's call in our lives. Today's Readings: Genesis 3:9–15, 20; Psalm 98:1, 2–3ab, 3cd–4; Ephesians 1:3–6, 11–12; Luke 1:26–38.

Tuesday, December 9, 2014

St. Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin

Juan Diego's indigenous name was *Cuauhtlatoatzin*, which means "talking eagle." Juan Diego referred to himself as "a nobody . . . a small rope, a tiny ladder, the tail end, a leaf." Yet the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to him with a message to raise up the downtrodden. That God has raised the lowly is proclaimed in the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46–55). Consider praying daily over this text, from Luke's account of the Gospel, during Advent. Today's Readings: Isaiah 40:1–11; Psalm 96:1–2, 3 and 10ac, 11–12, 13; Matthew 18:12–14.

Wednesday, December 10, 2014

Come to Me

In today's Gospel Jesus says, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). In the sections of Handel's *Messiah* leading up to Christ's birth is the oratorio "Comfort ye." There we hear words of consolation and solace proclaimed through the ages. You might want to consider listening to this or other music that might lead you to a spirit of contemplation as we prepare the way of the Lord who comes to comfort us. Today's Readings: Isaiah 40:25–31; Psalm 103:1–2, 3–4, 8 and 10; Matthew 11:28–30.

Thursday, December 11, 2014

Optional Memorial St. Damasus I, Pope

Pope Damasus was a patron/sponsor of St. Jerome, whose Latin translation of the Scripture (the Vulgate) was declared eleven centuries later as the official translation of the Bible. In today's Gospel, Jesus says to the crowds, "Let anyone with ears listen!" (Matthew 11:15). We are called to listen attentively to the Word of God. It is easier to listen to the Word at Mass if we have read it beforehand. You might want to plan to make time to read the Scriptures for Sunday a day beforehand. Today's Readings: Isaiah 41:13–20; Psalm 145:1 and 9, 10–11, 12–13ab; Matthew 11:11–15.

Friday, December 12, 2014

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Today we celebrate the feast of the Mother of the Americas, as Pope John Paul II called Our Lady of Guadalupe. A young Native American maiden dressed as an Aztec princess appeared at the hill of Tepeyac to a poor local man, St. Juan Diego, on December 9, 1531. To honor Our Lady of Guadalupe, you might want to place an image of her near the Advent wreath. Pray for the day when all will be afforded the dignity due them as a child of God. Today's Readings: Zechariah 2:14–17; Psalm: Judith 13:18bcde, 19; Luke 1:26–38.

Saturday, December 13, 2014

St. Lucy, Virgin and Martyr

In the year 304, this young Christian woman refused to renounce her faith during the persecution by the Emperor Diocletian and was martyred. Today, countless women and men have given their lives defending the Christian faith. Consider searching for stories of modern-day martyrs, such as Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel, lay missionary Jean Donovan, and Maryknoll Sisters Maura Clarke and Ita Ford, who were abducted and martyred in El Salvador on December 2, 1980. Pray for those who suffer persecution or face a martyr's death. Today's Readings: Sirach 48:1–4, 9–11; Psalm 80:2ac and 3b, 15–16, 18–19; Matthew 17:9a, 10–13.



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Keeping the Seasons
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