

Spirit of Life

Parish Newsletter — January/February 2010

A Letter From Our Pastor

The Gifts of the Epiphany

Dear Parishioners,

When we observe the season of Advent and its simplicity, the Christmas Season becomes more meaningful as we celebrate the feasts of the Holy Family, the Epiphany, and the Baptism of the Lord. Christmas is only one day in the secular world, yet for Christians, we celebrate the impact of the Word made flesh on our daily lives and carry it into the New Year.

One often-overlooked feast that we recently celebrated is the Feast of the Epiphany. With the secular celebrations over, we can concentrate on the spiritual meaning of this solemnity. I would like to reflect a bit on the Epiphany and how it invites us to be good stewards and faithful disciples.

For most of us, Epiphany is just an afterthought of Christmas, the day we observe the arrival of the wise men in Bethlehem. And we've all heard homilies explaining how that odd word Epiphany comes from the Greek meaning "showing forth," because the child Jesus was shown forth to the magi (who were Gentiles) as the



Savior of all people, not only the Messiah of the Jews. That is true, but the Epiphany has a much deeper message; one for you and for me.

The magi did not come just to gawk at the baby Jesus. They came because they knew He was someone special. "Where is the newborn king of the Jews?" they asked (Mt 2:2), although

He's not the sort of king who lives in palaces. As St. Matthew relates it (2:11), "They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh." They came to worship and part of that worship included offering gifts to the newborn Lord.

Jesus welcomes all who come to visit Him, even those who come out of mere curiosity. But when we really meet Him, our instinctive response is to worship because we recognize that His character is unlike anyone else's we've ever met ~ He is someone special. For most of us, we recognize our encounter with Him at Mass.

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Stewardship: *New Year's Resolutions*

The New Year has arrived and we are all busy making and trying to keep our list of New Year's Resolutions. Many of us choose resolutions geared toward health and fitness. After all, possessing good overall health is critical to our well-being. Others of us try to avoid a particularly bad habit. Maybe you need to quit smoking or stop swearing. Still others of us plan things we have always wanted to do, but never get around to doing.

As the days of January continue onward, however, many of us find the luster for keeping our good-intentioned resolutions to be fading fast. By the end of the month, most of us have given in to our temptations and returned to our old ways. We are only human, right? Discouraged by this yearly failure, many of us don't even bother making New Year's Resolutions anymore, especially if we feel like we won't succeed.

Maybe our failures lie in both how we make our resolutions and what resolutions we actually choose. What we need to understand is the "root" of our resolution. For example, if you resolve to eat less candy to drop those recently added holiday pounds, is the "root" of your resolution a selfish one – wanting to look better since you overindulged? Or, are you genuinely seeking to stop giving in to each "sweet tooth" craving by practicing mortification – giving up of a personal pleasure to glorify God? If the "root" is a selfish one – only to benefit yourself – then often it is difficult keeping in the long run. If we are trying to glorify God though, our mission is much more important and worth keeping.

Tying your New Year's Resolutions into the principles of stewardship – giving of your time, talent, and treasure back to God – is a great way to ensure that the "root" of your resolution is right on track! For instance, resolving to pray each evening before going to bed glorifies God, brings you peace before slumber, and allows you to grow in your relationship with Christ. The "root" is pure. Your desire to keep it will be stronger and make it easier for you to keep. In the same way, resolving to return your talents to God by helping others in need is an excellent choice in creating a selfless resolution with the right "root." Furthermore, resolving to re-evaluate your finances is



also extremely important and the beginning of a new year is a great time to do it. Are you giving back to God out of gratitude for all He has given you? Or, are you merely dropping a dollar or two in the collection basket just to feel good about yourself?

If you are not where you would like to be as a good steward – either with sharing your time, talent or treasure - you can resolve to do better. The New Year is a perfect opportunity to start anew and become the good steward God desires each of us to become. And, when we choose selfless things that build His kingdom instead of ours, we are sure to not only stay on track, but to succeed!

Angel Babies Offers Comfort For Grieving Families

"For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb."

-Psalm 139:13

For mothers like parishioner Tina Ding, the Angel Babies Ministry has truly been a godsend.

Her story with the ministry began when she was wrought with grief after miscarrying two babies and giving birth to Grace, her 37½ week old stillborn child.

"I was in the ultimate place of heartache and I needed the comfort of Moms going through the same thing," she says.

It did not take long for our merciful Lord to hear her cry. In her desperation, about seven years ago, she met with Outreach Coordinator Alison Krumm, and a few other women undergoing the pain of infant loss. They had a fruitful meeting at our parish, and the ministry, soon named Angel Babies, began to blossom.

"After attending Angel Babies for a few years, I came full circle into a place of peace with the loss," says Tina. "It changed my life. Now I can talk about my baby without crying; as part of our family who is in heaven waiting for us."

Angel Babies is a pregnancy and infant loss support group that has helped many grieving persons in our faith community and beyond in profound ways. According to their official pamphlet, their "mission is to provide a place of spiritual fellowship for parents who have suffered the death of their baby. Group members include moms and dads of miscarriage, stillbirth, SIDS losses, pre-maturity, as well as those losses due to various medical reasons."

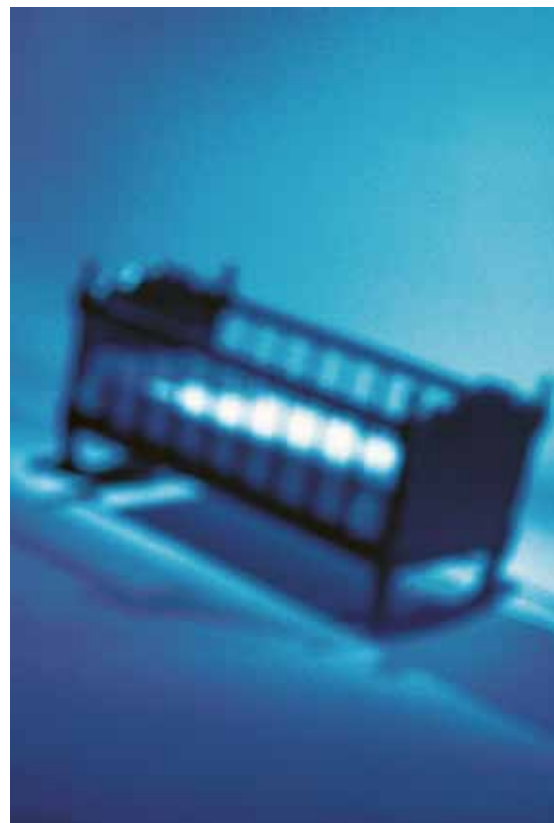
Angel Babies, which meets on the second Thursday of every month in our Parish Conference Room from 7 to 9 p.m., is a unique gift that was born of the Holy Spirit. There is no other local group that addresses pregnancy and infant loss and offers support in the same way that it does. Through its Grief Support Program, participants learn about the stages of grief and share with others who are undergoing or have undergone the infant loss grieving process. The program works to acknowledge and express feelings and thoughts in a safe, confidential setting; to increase the understanding of the grief process and to normalize it; to develop healthy coping strategies and accept the reality of the loss; and to develop a support system within and outside the group.

"I see such fear in people who have lost a child," says Alison, the ministry's overall coordinator. "They wonder if they will ever be able to get through the loss and trust God again, and have a child. They get to a point where they feel their life is out of control. It is a painful place for folks to be. We started this group with a hope to be clearly genuine in saying, 'We are here and we understand.'"

Mina Pedersen started attending Angel Babies when she found out that the child she was pregnant with did not have the ability to sustain its life. She lost her child, Ruban Elkan, at 28 weeks.

"Angel Babies provides a stable place of comfort where I feel I can always talk about my baby, and just be myself and find relief," says Mina. "If it wasn't for this ministry I wouldn't have worked through my grief nearly as well as I have."

This ministry is an example of the beautiful compassion and mercy that flows from the Heart of Jesus, on to those who need it most. For more information, contact Alison at 663-1660 or Jenn at 221-1179.



More than Lectors: Readers

Though we are all able to read, not all of us are Readers of the Word, commonly called lectors. So what's the difference? What distinguishes simple reading from "Reading the Word"?

Reading the Word requires an understanding of proclamation and proper spiritual preparation. And like the prophets of Israel — Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, and Jonah — who were called by God to proclaim his Word, our Readers are also God's instruments for proclaiming his Word anew. At each reading, the people may be hearing God's Word for the first time.

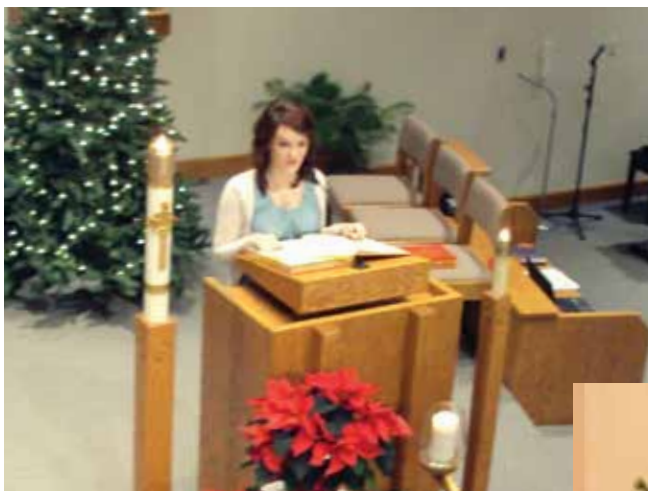
"Reading at Mass is different than almost all other public speaking forums for the simple reason that we are communicating the ongoing Word of God," says Jay Griffin,

the Director of Music and Liturgy. "We are proclaiming the story of how God has been with us through history, a history which continues through today and into tomorrow."

The Reader of the Word, then, does not read a regular, human text that is subject to decay and irrelevance. God's Word is more than that; it is, St. Paul writes to the Hebrews, "living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow."

And because of the power of this Word, the Readers of the Word don't just show up and read off the page, like one would with this newsletter.

"The importance of this cannot be understated," Jay says, "which is why we expect our Readers of the Word to prepare ahead of time, to know the readings inside and out, to know



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Director of Music and Liturgy*

of the Word at Spirit of Life

what the author is writing about, the circumstances behind the reading and even how the author may have been feeling about the words that were written.”

So what does a Reader of the Word do? Before the Sunday when he or she is scheduled to read, he or she begins to prepare. With the assistance of a workbook, the Reader of the Word learns the context of the reading, its historical background, and then prays and meditates on the text, discovering God’s message within it.

The Readers of the Word put in this preparation so they can transmit the power of the Scriptures to the congregation on Sunday.

“The basic assumption is this,” Jay says. “If our reader doesn’t know what they are reading, the congregation won’t either.”

We currently have around 40 Readers of the Word serving at Spirit of Life, and they read once every two or three months, depending on what Mass they attend.

A new crop of Readers of the Word have joined through the recent ministry sign-up, and trainings are also offered whenever someone new begins. To find out more about participating in this ministry of God’s Word, call Jay at 663-1660.

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The Patron of Catholic Schools in America *St. Elizabeth Ann Seton*

As the first American-born canonized saint, Elizabeth Ann Seton's entrance into history was guided by Divine Providence. Born on Aug. 28, 1774 immediately following the Boston Tea Party, Elizabeth's childhood witnessed pivotal events in the formation of our country: the Continental Congress, the Declaration of Independence, and the American Revolution. At the time of the foundation of the new Republic, in a society predominately hostile toward Catholicism, a flower blossomed that would forever change the shape of education in the United States.

Elizabeth Seton was born into a wealthy Protestant family in New York City. Her life, although materially blessed, was not without suffering. Elizabeth's biological mother died when she was only three, and her younger sister, Catherine Josephine, died at the age of two. A spark of faith, however, was visible even in her early childhood. When questioned about her sadness concerning her sister's death, Elizabeth simply responded: "Kitty is gone up to heaven. I wish I could go there too."

Elizabeth grew into a beautiful woman, courted lavishly by handsome young men from prominent New York families. At the age of 19, she met a charming New York financier, William Seton, and the couple was wed in 1794. They remained in high society until her father-in-law's passing, which left them to care for William's seven younger siblings, along with three children of their own. Consequently, the Seton finances crashed.

The couple traveled to Italy, and it was here that William's health failed him, and he died in December 1803. Providentially, Elizabeth was left in the company of a strong Catholic family where she witnessed the practice of the Faith. In a letter to her sister, Elizabeth wrote: "My sister dear, how



happy would we be, if we believed what these dear souls believe, that they possess God in the Sacrament, and that He remains in their churches..."

After an eight month stay, Elizabeth returned to America, where she began to investigate Catholicism more deeply. She was besought by Protestant friends who hoped to dissuade her. At this time Elizabeth prayed repeatedly: "If I am right, Thy grace impart, still in the right to stay. If I am wrong, oh teach my heart to find the better way."

In 1805, after much interior struggle, Elizabeth became Catholic. Abandoned entirely by her family and friends, she resolved her financial difficulties through teaching.

In 1807, Elizabeth was invited to establish a Catholic school for girls in Baltimore. The task was daunting and Elizabeth labored feverously, explaining that "from half past five in the morning until nine at night, every moment is full—no space even to be troubled." After winters spent in continual hardship and sacrifice, the school flourished and, within years, Mother Seton planted the seed from which sprang the parochial school system (along with hospitals and orphanages).

Before her death in January of 1821, she was the active mother of five (although two of her daughters died young) and the spiritual Mother of a full-fledged religious congregation known as the Sisters of Charity of the Americas. She was canonized in 1975 and her feast day is celebrated on Jan. 4.

Thanks to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, the Catholic parochial school system remains vibrant and active. From Jan. 31 to Feb. 6, we celebrate Catholic Schools Week. We are thankful for the sacrifice of this loving wife, devoted mother, foundress, and All-American saint.

Lives of Service:

Deacon Dave Vaughn and Deacon Joel Melarvie

When he was 10 years old, Joel Melarvie wanted to be a Lutheran minister. “I’ve always wanted to serve God in some way from a very young age,” Joel says. “I have always felt a great comfort and peace in the church, even at a young age.”

Now one of our two deacons and Chancellor of the diocese, Joel has found his way to serve in the Church.

Joel is joined by Dave Vaughn, our other deacon, in performing liturgical service by assisting at Sunday Masses, preaching every other month, performing baptisms, witnessing weddings, and administering funerals. Joel has served as a deacon at Spirit of Life since 2001, and Dave since 1987.

Dave also worked full time at a Pastoral Associate at Spirit of Life for 13 years, and for the last eight years until this past year, Dave also served as the chaplain to over 850 inmates at the North Dakota State Penitentiary.

Dave and his wife Diane had both served extensively at the parish and in the diocese before his ordination, especially through the Pre-Cana program for engaged couples. But Dave wanted to make an even deeper commitment.

Dave says that he gets most “satisfaction from working in a community from an ordained perspective, being able to work in the lives of people and being a part of those important moments.”

The deacon gets to accompany people at life’s most important times: baptisms at births, marriages, and funerals at deaths. “You become a part of a family in that way, which is deeper fulfillment of parish family life,” he says.

The deacon’s role, from its origin during the time of the apostles, is to serve. But the formation for the diaconate, Joel says, was a deep benefit just to him.

“I know that by God’s grace the deacon formation program and being a deacon have brought me into a much closer relationship with God,” Joel says. “I have a whole new outlook on others, and it has taken both me and my wife into a deeper understanding of the Gospel message.”

Before his ordination, Joel taught faith formation classes and served as an usher and as a lector. But he was called to do more: not just by God, but by someone very close by.

“It was Dave Vaughn who encouraged my wife and me to get involved in the deacon formation program,” he says. “If he hadn’t encouraged me, I wouldn’t be a deacon today.”

Like Dave and Diane, Joel and his wife Arlene perform much of their service together. When Joel meets with an engaged couple or performs a baptism, or witnesses a wedding, Arlene is almost always there, too.

As a deacon, Joel has continued to grow. Through his service, he has been especially impressed by two things: Christ’s inclusiveness and His life’s powerful example.

Christ always “reached out to others regardless of their physical condition, social status or sinfulness,” Dave says. “And our faith in Christ underlies our personal response to his living example of love, forgiveness and compassion.”



Deacon Dave Vaughn and his wife, Diane



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The Gifts of the Epiphany *continued from front cover*

But meeting Jesus and worshipping Him calls forth an additional response, and so we, along with the wise men, offer our gifts. And what are they? They are our time, our talent, and our treasure.

We can find symbolic meanings in the magi's gifts. As you would suspect, gold represents treasure. Even today, frankincense is the chief ingredient used in producing the incense that is used at Mass, therefore it represents the gift of the time we offer in worship and prayer. Finally, myrrh is a fitting symbol for our gift of talent because it takes knowledge and skill to transform the raw gum from tree sap into the forms used in perfumes.

As we begin this New Year, let us take a moment to reflect on our place in the Epiphany narrative. Are you willing to undertake the journey to find the King? What gifts will you offer him in 2010?

In Christ,

Fr. Chad Gion

Pastor