



## FROM THE DESK OF FR. MIKE

Today, we begin the new liturgical year. Today, we begin the Advent season as people of faith. Today, our faith calls each of us, followers of Jesus to offer hope, peace, joy, and love to one another. We do this knowing of the hope, peace, joy and love we ourselves find in Jesus Christ, God's Son, born of Mary, as Savior of the world.

As we come to St. Mary's today, prominently displayed in front of the altar is our Advent wreath. The wreath reminds us of the start of our preparation for Jesus' birth, the start of a new liturgical season, the start of something new in our lives. One candle is lit each week, encouraging us to actively and prayerfully ready our hearts, spirits, and souls for the birth of the Lord. With each Sunday of Advent, another candle is lit on the Advent wreath.

As we pray through Advent, the four weeks of Advent are the four Sundays directly preceding Christmas Day. Each of the four weeks of Advent invites us to focus on a specific theme as described below.

### **First Week of Advent: Hope**

The first week of Advent starts on the first Sunday of Advent. On this Sunday we light the Prophecy Candle, which is purple. This candle symbolizes Hope, as we begin our four-week journey of expectant preparations. The theme of Hope reminds all of us that Jesus is coming and that He will lead us out of darkness and into salvation. We might also begin physical preparations for Christmas, such as putting up a Christmas tree, the hanging of the greens, among other liturgical and family traditions.

This Advent, praying into hope, focus on the things you are hoping to accomplish now and in the future, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

### **Second Week of Advent: Peace**

On the second Sunday of Advent, we light a second candle, known as the Bethlehem Candle, which is also purple. This candle represents Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem. During the second week of Advent we are invited to reflect on God's promise of universal Peace through Christ and how we can be an incarnation of that peace in our daily lives, by helping those in need, just as Mary and Joseph did.

As we pray through Advent, take a moment to pray for Christ's peace to be known by all people on planet Earth. You can pray for peace in the world, peace in your community, peace in your family, or peace within yourself. May these prayers bring you comfort and ease your worries.

### **Third Week of Advent: Joy**

The third Sunday of Advent is known as Gaudete Sunday and is all about Joy. Gaudete is the Latin word for "Rejoice," and on this Sunday we light the Shepherd's Candle. The third candle is pink, which is the liturgical color that represents joy. The joy we celebrate this week is the joy of our faith, the joy that we have experienced so far this season, and the joy at the coming of Christ.

This Advent, pray that joy in the Lord may guide you in your efforts, your hopes and desires; that joy may be known by all you share Christmas with this year.

### **Fourth Week of Advent: Love**

The fourth Sunday of Advent is all about Love — specifically, God's love for the world, Christ's love for all of us, and our love for our neighbors. The fourth candle on the Advent wreath is once again purple, and it is known as the Angel's Candle. This candle serves as a reminder of the angel's message, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

As you pray through Advent, focus on the love God provides you, with each breath each day you have on Earth. Remember that relationships may come and go, but God's love for you is unending. Pray of the many ways that God loves you and how you see His love in your daily life.

May the rich themes of hope, peace, joy and love be part of our preparation for Jesus' birth at Christmas.

Pope Francis reminds us that; "Advent is a journey towards Bethlehem. May we let ourselves be drawn by the light of God made man." As you leave the church today, you will find copies of an Advent Reflection Book written by Pope Francis. Please take a copy of this book home with you to add to your Advent prayer and preparation for our celebration of our Savior's birth.

Thank you to all who have generously supported the Guild of St. Mary Sharing Tree, offering joy to people cared for by our Sharing Parish and Catholic Charities.

Thank you to all who have responded to the challenge of a parishioners' lead gift of \$10,000 to support migrant families, supported and comforted by Catholic Charities.

Thank you to all who are fulfilling their 2023 Annual Catholic Appeal to the Archdiocese.

Thank you to all who generously support the ministry of St. Mary's in the weekly offertory and End of Year gift to the parish at Christmas.

May God bless us with hearts filled with hope these Advent days,

*Fr. Mike Nacur*