

Christmas 2020

We, the people of St. Agnes, are called by God as a Catholic Christian community to be prayerful, compassionate servants to all God's people. – *Mission Statement*

ST. AGNES CONGREGATION, Butler, Wis.

www.stagnesparish.org

DECEMBER 2020



Poinsettias, evergreens and candles fill the sanctuary of St. Agnes during the 2018 Christmas season. Donations from parishioners provide for the costs each year. Flowers are purchased from Shady Lane Greenhouses.

WELCOME to all

Are you new? Whether you're just visiting or looking to stay, it is great to have you with us.

Whether you have been here many times or never been to Church before, you can anticipate an encouraging and enlightening experience.

No strings attached.

If you are a guest with us today, please don't feel you need to give any money in the offering. This service is our gift to you.

Whatever your circumstances – single, married, single again, with or without children – and no matter where you've been or what's happened in your life, you are welcome here.

St. Agnes Parish is a warm and welcoming community. We realize that a sense of community and connection is as important as ever during these times that may leave us feeling isolated and alone. We want you to know we are here for you.

Welcome, again. We hope you enjoy your time with us today.

Time to rejoice, express gratitude

"I bring you good news of great joy for everyone! This very day in David's town your Savior has been born — Christ the Lord!"
(Luke 2:10-11)

Much has happened in our life and around the world during this year because of the pandemic. But Christmas is a time to celebrate New Life, and hence a time of rejoicing. New life gives rise to a renewed hope! The reason for our rejoicing is the birth of Christ the child. As Christians, we have every reason to rejoice because God has entered our history and guides it with infinite love!

Christmas is an opportune time to express our gratitude to God for the gift of His Son. It is also a season to think of our loved ones with thankfulness, including the ones we lost, because each person is indeed a gift from God! Therefore, I take this opportunity to thank every one of you — the parish and school community — for your love, support, and service at St. Agnes! My heartfelt gratitude goes out to all of you

Fr. Joy Thachil, SAC
thachilj@stagnesparish.org

from the Pastor



for accompanying and cooperating with me during these past few months since I arrived at St. Agnes. The journey, together has been very rewarding and personally enriching, although I still need to learn your names and see your faces!!

My sincere wish and humble prayer for you in the New Year is that you may constantly recognize the Savior's face in your daily life.

May the discovery and experience of His presence lead you ahead with confidence and trust in the Lord. May the encounter with our Savior encourage you to share His Joy, especially through your daily prayers and acts of mercy to the most needy! Wishing you and your loved ones a Blessed Christmas and a Grace-filled New Year!



Stewardship How do you use your perfect gift?

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” -Ephesians 2:8a

True confessions: I’ve never worn the jaunty Christmas tie my son bought me five years ago. It’s a waste, I know. At the end of every December I shake my head and say, well, maybe next year.

We ought to make good use of our gifts, but most of us have a few Christmas presents, given and received in love, that are forlornly collecting dust in a drawer or closet. That’s not very good stewardship.

More important than a bottle of perfume or a loud tie, how are you stewarding that most precious of all Christmas gifts — the new life you have through faith in Jesus? Do you cherish it, honor it, make the most of all it has to offer? Because it is truly amazing.

New life. Too many Christians focus exclusively on the AFTERlife that begins when we die. But that’s missing out on the joy, peace and fulfillment that Jesus promises us today, what he describes as life abundant. You’ve doubtless seen evidence of this life in the cheerful eyes and peaceful smiles of holy people you’ve encountered. Light seems to radiate from them.

I want that life. Don’t you?

The abundant life is Jesus’ free gift, but it doesn’t come automatically. It grows with us as we grow in faith through prayer, scripture study, worship, service and generosity — the disciplines of faith. In doing so, we align our hearts and souls with God’s purposes and fulfill ever more closely those two holy commandments to love God and neighbor.

This year, don’t let your faith end up like a jaunty Christmas tie, hanging unused in the closet. Make the most of it and live into the new, abundant life Jesus promises to us all. It’s the number one stewardship lesson.

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The Nativity scene is featured in the vestibule during Christmas season. Volunteers spend many hours decorating the church and the vestibule.

Environment

Christmas nativity set in vestibule

by Marilyn Schultz

Decorating our church for Christmas has been a tradition for many years dating back to at least the Depression when Frances Wros was the sacristan for the old church. For the past 50 years, countless parishioners have volunteered their time to prepare both the church and the vestibule for Christmas under the direction of Gerry Gross from the Environment Committee.

The sanctuary has been remodeled

several times during that period. The original Nativity set, that dated back to the old church, was placed directly below the statues of Mary and Joseph during the 1970s. Because these statues were made of porcelain and were so fragile, they were replaced by larger molded figures and relocated to the vestibule. A new Nativity set was purchased about 10 years ago. When it is displayed in the lobby, you will notice that a few of the porcelain sheep from the original set are included.

Hark, how the bells...

by Marilyn Schultz

The ringing of church bells dates back to AD 400. Paulinus of Nola was the first man to introduce them to the Christian church, and Pope Sabinianus sanctioned their use in AD 604. Church bells became more common in Europe during the Middle Ages.

Pagan winter celebrations included ringing bells to drive out evil spirits. The superstition that bells drive away evil should not be believed because it is not Bible-based.

Today, the main purpose of ringing bells is to announce that a service is beginning and worshippers should gather for the church service. Bells may also be rung for weddings and funerals.

The first bell at St. Agnes was obtained when St. Martin’s Church in Engelsburg (located across from Timmerman Field on Appleton Avenue) was razed in 1924. The

bell was brought to St. Agnes and stored in the church basement until 1941 when Frank Brahm donated \$50 to erect a steeple on the old church. Frank’s son, Clarence, built the steeple in his spare time and installed the bell. It tolled for the first time on May 30, 1941 at the wedding of Barbara Schmidt to Harold Cardo.

In 1963 the bell and its steeple were removed from the old church which was then being used as a gym and was donated to a missionary priest.

An electronic carillon bell system was installed in 1971 and was used until recent years when it could no longer be repaired. A parishioner has generously donated the funds for a new carillon bell system that was recently installed. Bells can now be heard each day at noon and ten minutes before each weekend Mass. The bells will also toll at funerals.



Liturgy

Christmas: a sense of the season

You probably know the song “The Twelve Days of Christmas.” Even though a radio station once proclaimed the twelve days of Christmas as those before December 25, Christians have always kept Christmas as a season from December 25 until January 6 (the traditional Epiphany). The church calendar today even extends the celebration until the feast of the Baptism of the Lord — the Sunday after Epiphany.

Here is what the church says about the season of Christmas: “Next to the yearly celebration of the paschal mystery [meaning the Triduum and Easter season], the church holds most sacred the memorial of Christ’s birth and early manifestations. This is the purpose of the Christmas season.” (General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar, #32)

More than just “Jesus’ birthday,” the Christmas season is a time for remembering and reveling in the nativity of Christ, the revelation of Christ to the Jewish shepherds, the revelation of Christ to the Gentile magi (that’s us!), Christ’s baptism by John in the

Jordan, and Christ changing water into wine at the wedding “on the third day” (John 2:1) in Cana of Galilee. In all these saving events, we know that “the Word is made flesh and dwells among us.”

How can we keep Christmas not just as a day, but as a season?

- Keep the tree up (and watered!) and shining bright until the Baptism of the Lord.
- Sing carols and read the scriptures every day.
- Safely put candles around your creche:
- Use small glass votive candle holders, and place them away from the straw.

You might also want to add a little water to the bottom of the glass before putting the candle in — an added precaution that will also help you clean the glass more easily. When you light the candles, sing or say the prayer of the angels: Glory in heaven and peace on earth, now and forever. Amen!

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CHRISTMAS CALENDAR

Dec. 26 St. Stephen, first Christian martyr

Dec. 27 Holy Family: Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

Dec. 28 Holy Innocents, young children killed by order of King Herod

Dec. 29 St. Thomas Becket, martyr

Jan. 1 Mary, Mother of God

Jan. 3 Epiphany (Feast of the Three Kings)

Jan. 4 St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, founder of first Catholic schools in the U.S.

Jan. 5 St. John Neuman, founder of first Catholic diocesan school system in the U.S.

Jan. 10 Baptism of Jesus

Fellowship

Christmas, stewardship, community fellowship help to overcome COVID-19 challenges

by Kathy Schroeder

Advent is here! As we await the birth of our Savior Jesus, we sing, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel!”

During Mass, the congregation is led by the cantors, who volunteer their gifts and talents.

We witness the lighting of the Advent Candle in church by those who have volunteered.

Our church environment is transformed into a beautiful winter wonderland with lighted evergreens, wreaths with bright red bows and a stable...awaiting the baby Jesus! Volunteers make this happen!

Usually our choirs of singers and handbell ringers are busily practicing traditional and contemporary Christmas songs to aid us all as we lift our

hearts and spirits in song. Guided by our liturgical director, Meggie Moyer, we sing these throughout Advent, Christmas and Epiphany. BUT — this season is different.

Because of Covid-19, there are no choirs. The church pews are not filled to capacity. There are no gatherings or meetings; no Parish Festival; no Spooketti Dinner or Athletic activities; no Holly Fair; no Welcoming “Donut” Sunday to welcome new parishioners; no school plays; no forensics; no missions, no Bible studies.

So much of “life at St. Agnes” has come to a standstill! Will there be Christmas?

We all can be “stewards of the faith,” by continuing to share our TIME, TALENTS, and TREASURES! Our church will once again be filled with beautiful ever-

greens and a stable. There will be Christmas songs to sing!

We will “fellowship” to one another by continuing to volunteer at Mass as eucharistic ministers, ministers of hospitality, and now clean-up ministers! We have learned to keep in touch with one another “virtually” and on social media! We have learned to “social distance”!

Christmas is all about our spirits that nothing of this world can diminish! Emmanuel — God with us!

Christmas is about needing each other — relying, trusting, carrying each others’ burdens and rejoicing with joy!

Christmas is calling us to welcome each other as we anticipate the birth of Jesus, in heart, mind and spirit!

Evangelization



New traditions to honor the Christmas season

Discard any preconceived ideas of what your Christmas celebration should be and welcome today's opportunities. Maybe God is nudging you to know Christmas in a new way, to expand your understanding. Your past Christmases provided surprises and joys. The happiness you knew then is yours forever. Now there are new joys and surprises to encounter. See what God has in store.

Like the shepherds in the field, embrace the unexpected and be dazzled by the appearance of angels in your life. Like the Magi, follow your heart to new revelations, new truths. God is continually being revealed through persons, places, events

and all of creation on a daily basis. No virus can stop that! Your best celebrations aren't over. Open yourself to the potential of this Christmas to delight, comfort and amaze you.

What can you do differently this year? Sharing Christ with family and friends may not come naturally to all of us, but it is certainly something that we all can and should do. We must be careful to do it out of genuine love for them and to be sensitive to their response. The St. Agnes evangelization committee challenges you to consider the following new traditions:

- Be more generous with your time and prayers

- Shovel a neighbor's driveway
- Scrape the ice from a car windshield
- Offer to shop for a homebound or elderly friend or family member
- Provide food for our Food Pantry
- Pray aloud before meals and use the sign of the cross
- Pray for those who are sick and send a get-well card
- Fast at least one day during the season (long for Christ more than for food)

This Christmas season and the coming months will continue to be unusual in many ways. Take the opportunity to make it better for others.

Christian Formation

Living in peace, joy in new year

We wish you a blessed and joyful Christmas and a peace-filled New Year. We are here to support your family and provide sound faith formation for you and your children. Christmas is the perfect time to recognize the presence of Jesus in our everyday life; in the smile of a child or the elderly neighbor you check on, or the Christmas card greeting from a relative you lost touch with. Jesus touches us in more ways than we can imagine. Our prayer is that this New Year will bring us true peace and the joy of living in the presence of Jesus.

Here is a New Year's prayer from www.loyolapress.com :

God, thank you for a new year. May everyone in our family be willing to begin anew with a clean slate. We know that you are always ready to forgive us. Help us to be willing to forgive ourselves and to forgive one another.

As we begin a new year, remind us of our truest values and our deepest desires. Help us to live in the goodness that comes from doing what you want us to do. Help us to put aside anxiety about the future and the past, so that we might live in peace with you now, one day at a time.

Christmas blessings to you all,
Shelly, Patty, Ann, Scott





'How' Christmas means to me

by Jackie Schultz

The meaning of Christmas comes to me through words. The warm and uplifting words that show up in Christmas cards and conversations with my sisters, neighbors and friends. The words of the songs we sing: "Christ, Be Our Light," "Oh Come All Ye Faithful," "Joy to the World," "Go Tell It on the Mountain" and so many other songs replay in my mind throughout the days of December.

The children's books I read to my class express the wonder, surprise and loving kindness of Christmas through their words.

Most of all the message of Christmas comes to me through the words of Scripture. The words are familiar and yet offer new meaning every year:

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone." (*Isaiah 9:2*)

And also from Isaiah, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who bring glad tidings, announcing peace, bearing good news..." (*Isaiah 52:7*)

Finally, words from the Prologue of John's Gospel, words I love: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning and through him all things were made... the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

Jesus the Word, continues to dwell with us as a community of faith. Jesus lives within each of us and we can offer his life-giving Word to a world in need of hope and peace.

K-3 class

The mind of a three-year-old...

by Dawn Meyers

'Twas the week before Christmas in the K3 room.
Not a child was stirring as the clock struck noon.
The artwork is hung handled gently with care,
Hoping folks see our cute Christmas bears
The children are nestled for a story or two
To hear about Jesus as they already knew.
I read about a dark cold winter's night,
How three wise men saw a star so bright.
No Santa or reindeer to be found,
Only Mary, Joseph and Jesus around.
They notice a stable filled with hay
And ask if that means it's Jesus's birthday.
How proud I am they caught on so quick,
But continue to ask about Old Saint Nick.



Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night.
*From Micaela, Charlotte O, Maddox, Charlotte D,
Abby, Zaylee and Mrs. Meyers*

Explaining the Christmas Season to Little Ones

by Mary Langford

Christmas is a celebration of a special birthday. December 25 is the day we have our annual “birthday party” for Jesus. When I talk with the children about this magical and religion season, I always compare Christmas to our very own birthdays. Jesus’ birthday is really very similar to our own, and this is how I explain it.

For our birthday, we always have one very special day that we celebrate. We circle it on our calendars, because we don’t want anyone to forget about it!

For Jesus’ birthday, we always celebrate on December 25, which is his special day. We certainly don’t want to forget about Jesus’ birthday!

For our birthday, we get very excited...and have to do a lot of preparation for the celebration

For Jesus’ birthday we are also excited...and we call that time to prepare Advent.



For our birthday, we send out invitations so that people remember that we want to celebrate with them.

For Jesus’ birthday, we mail Christmas cards and send photos and messages.

For our birthday, we ask our parents almost every day, “How many days until my birthday?”



For Jesus’ birthday, we use Advent calendars and Jesse tree stories to help us countdown to his birthday.

For our birthday, we decorate the house with balloons, streamers, and signs. Sometimes we even have decorations outside on our lawns, or special flags that we hang on our doors.



For Jesus’ birthday we decorate the inside and outside our homes with lights, nativity scenes, wreaths, and trees full of garland, twinkling lights and ornaments.

For our birthday, we plan special foods for our celebration, including our favorite foods, and a fancy birthday cake!

For Jesus’ birthday, we also plan special foods for the celebration. Some families have traditions to eat special meals on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. We also decorate Christmas cookies, and munch on yummy candy canes and chocolates.

For our birthday, our friends and family sing “Happy Birthday” to us. We get really excited, because it’s a song just for this special day!



For Jesus’ birthday, we also celebrate by singing songs like “Silent Night,” “Away in the Manger” and “Angels We Have Heard on High”. These songs are special because we only sing them as we are getting ready for Christmas.



For our birthday, we light candles on our birthday cake to tell how old we are.

For Jesus’ birthday we light candles in our homes to remember that Jesus is our light.

For our birthday, friends and family give us gifts.

For Jesus’ birthday, Jesus asks Santa to share the joy of the day by bringing YOU gifts. Jesus loves to share, and Santa knows this.

For our birthday, we give people “goody bags” to let them know that we are happy to celebrate our day with them.



For Jesus’ birthday, we give gifts to others so that they know how much we care for them.

For our birthday, our parents love to tell us the story about the day we were born.



For Jesus’ birthday, we share Bible stories about the day that Jesus was born.

For our birthday, people say “Happy Birthday!” when they see us.

For Jesus’ birthday, we say “Merry Christmas!” when we see others.

So you see, Jesus’ birthday is the reason that we celebrate Christmas.



Christmas-themed student artwork



Art by Tommy



Art by a little angel



Art by Cassidy



Art by Christan



Art by Myles



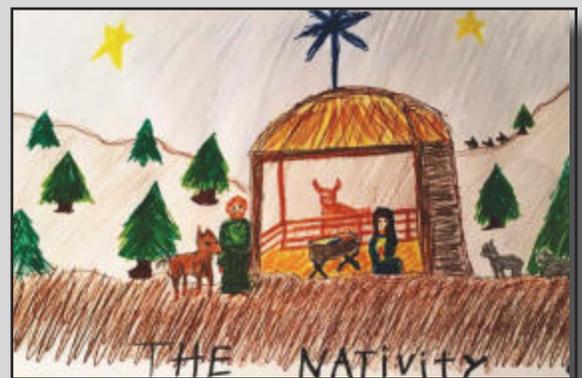
Art by Jessy



Art by Daniela



Art by Aaron



Art by Frankie

The Girl Who Saved Christmas

by Maliah Jackson, Grade 5

Once upon a time there was a girl named Lynn. She always wondered why she got her Christmas gifts so late. So one day, Lynn was washing dishes and got a phone call. The phone call was from Santa! He needed her help to deliver the rest of the gifts to children. Lynn rushed outside and waited for Santa to pick her up. Lynn could not believe her eyes when she saw Santa!

Next, Santa allowed Lynn on his sleigh. Lynn asked, "How many gifts do we have to deliver?" Santa replied, "31 gifts, Lynn." Lynn was in shock and said, "Wow, that's a lot!" Santa

crashed the sleigh! There was a lot of weight on the sleigh so it crashed. Lynn and Santa were very, very devastated.

Last, Lynn had no choice but to fix this! Santa gave her a globe so she can see anywhere and teleport anywhere. She teleported to the car repair shop to fix the sleigh! She fixed it in seconds. Lynn teleported back to Santa! She told Santa the car repair shop fixed the sleigh in 30 minutes!

Santa and Lynn got in the sleigh and directed the reindeer to deliver gifts to children all around the world! They yelled out with big smiles, "Merry Christmas to all!"



Art by Maliah Jackson



As we reflect on this strange and challenging year of 2020, we are mindful that through everything, **God is with us!**

Even though we have a lot of troubles and suffering, your faith makes us feel better about you. *1 Thessalonians 3:7*

Many men and women started having faith in the Lord. *Acts 5:14*

May God be kind to everyone who keeps on loving our Lord Jesus Christ. *Ephesians 6:24*

And when it all seemed hopeless, Abraham still had faith in God and became the ancestor of many nations. *Romans 4:18*

News about Jesus spread all over that part of the country. *Luke 4:37*

Unless you are willing to take up your cross and follow me, you are not fit to be my disciples. *Matthew 10:38*

Everyone who serves the Lord, come and offer praises. *Psalms 134:1*

Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. *John 1:5*

God is with us!

We continue to put our trust in the triune God of all ages...May we all enjoy the coming of Christ's Love to our hearts & homes this season.

courtesy of Gerry and Maryrose Wolf



Now the Work of Christmas Begins

by Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,

the work of Christmas begins:

to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.