

*Fourth Sunday of*  
**ADVENT**



2506 Gulf Gate Drive, Sarasota FL 34231 941-923-1691 [www.stthomasmoresrq.org](http://www.stthomasmoresrq.org)

We are a welcoming Catholic community devoted to living out and celebrating God's Word and Sacraments by connecting people to Christ through faith, love and ministry.

**Weekdays:** 8:00 am Mass **Saturday:** 8:00 am and 4:00 pm Masses, confessions at 3:00 pm **Sunday:** 8:00 am, 10:00 am, 12 noon Masses

**Office hours:** Monday-Friday 8:30 am-4:30 pm; closed for lunch: 12:00-1:00 pm

# *Christmas Greetings from St. Thomas More*



The light of the Christmas star to you,  
The warmth of home and hearth to you,  
The cheer and good will of friends to you,  
The hope of a childlike heart to you,  
The joy of a thousand angels to you,  
The love of the Son of God and God's peace to you.

Fr. Gordon, Fr. Jim and all the staff at St. Thomas More  
would like to wish our visitors and parishioners  
a peace-filled and joyous Christmas Season.

May the presence of the Christ Child  
fill your hearts and home with peace, joy and love.



## **Christmas Mass Schedule**

### **Christmas Eve**

#### **Masses in the Church**

3:00pm

5:00pm

10:00pm

#### **Masses in the Chelsea Center**

3:15pm

5:15pm

### **Christmas Day**

#### **All Masses in the Church**

10:00am

12 noon

# FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT



## Waiting

God of wisdom and strength,  
we await you.

Like David, we await your prophetic guidance  
and the peace you promise.

Like Mary, we await the liberation  
of all people

and the fullness of your kingdom.

Do not keep us waiting.

Deliver us from hatred, ignorance,  
and apathy.

Bring us your justice and your healing.

Give us your wisdom, compassion,  
and courage.

Show us your light.

We await you, for you alone can save us.

Come quickly, Lord! Do not delay.

We await you.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Sunday, December 20, 2020**

**Favored Ones**



*Today's Readings: 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Psalm 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38.* God chose David, the youngest son in his family and a mere shepherd, to be king. David was a skilled and competent leader, but he was also devout. As he acknowledges all that God has done for him, he expresses his wish to do something for God, namely, to build God a temple. God replies that he needs no such favors from David. God then elevates the king still further by promising that David's descendants would rule over Israel forever.

Mary, an insignificant woman from a Galilean village, would never have imagined how much God would favor her. She does not think there is anything important she could do

for God, but the angel assures her that there is. Though startled and hesitant, Mary accepts God's will. She is ultimately elevated even above King David. She both bears God's Son and becomes part of the new era that this long-awaited descendant of David brings about.

We are God's favored ones, too. God strengthens us to live devoutly. He speaks to us in the law and the prophets and now also in the letters of the Apostles and in the Gospels. He sent his Son to reveal his extraordinary love. The love of God is a mystery that broadens and deepens the more we enter into it. We are surrounded and uplifted by this endless love. God invites us to bear that love in the world so that all will know his grace and favor.



## THIS WEEK AT HOME

### Monday, December 21

#### Leaping for Joy

Today's readings urge us to rejoice, even to leap for joy. Such joy is not a mere emotion but a state of being. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, we simultaneously look further ahead to his return in glory. God came into our world, and we know that God will come again. Even now, God is with us. God will never leave us. Play music such as Handel's "Messiah" and sing or dance for joy. *Today's Readings: Song of Songs 2:8–14 or Zephaniah 3:14–18a; Psalm 33:2–3, 11–12, 20–21; Luke 1:39–45.*

### Tuesday, December 22

#### Reversals

Hannah at last bears a child through the power of God. In thanksgiving, she dedicates her son for service to the Lord. Having just had her own experience of reversal, Hannah then prophesies about the changes of fortune that await Israel. Centuries later, Mary echoes Hannah's words as she voices her prophetic hymn. Use Hannah's song or Mary's Magnificat to pray for all those who need God to lift them up. *Today's Readings: 1 Samuel 1:24–28; 1 Samuel 2:1, 4–5, 6–7, 8abcd; Luke 1:46–56.*

### Wednesday, December 23

#### Purification

Like other prophets, Elijah helped cleanse God's people by stopping their worship of foreign gods. In the First Reading, we hear that Elijah will return to purify another generation of God's people. John the Baptist was Elijah for the people of his day. In every age, we need prophets to help us purify our hearts and prepare for the fullness of God's presence. Pray with an image of John the Baptist. In what ways should you purify yourself to prepare for the day of the Lord? *Today's Readings: Malachi 3:1–4, 23–24; Psalm 25:4–5ab, 8–9, 10 and 14; Luke 1:57–66.*

### Thursday, December 24

#### Rest from Our Enemies

God has granted King David and all Israel safety from their enemies. This time of peace was a glimpse of the peace that God would one day bring to the whole world. Zechariah prophesies that this new era is about to begin. God will vanquish violence, pain, greed, hatred, injustice—all of the evil that endangers us. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior, pray for those people and places that especially need God's peace. *Today's Readings: 2 Samuel 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16; Psalm 89:2–3, 4–5, 27 and 29; Luke 1:67–79.*

### Friday, December 25

#### Among Shepherds

We don't know what Mary expected when she became the mother of God's Son. Probably, she didn't expect to lay this divine child in a feeding trough nor to be visited by shepherds. She must have been baffled, but she calmly accepted and reflected on all of it. The surprising way in which God chose to free us from evil and death is something for us to ponder, too. In the midst of what might be a full and busy day, take some time to sit before a nativity scene and reflect on its meaning. *Today's Readings: Isaiah 62:11–12; Psalm 97:1, 6, 11–12; Titus 3:4–7; Luke 2:15–20.*

### Saturday, December 26

#### St. Stephen, the First Martyr

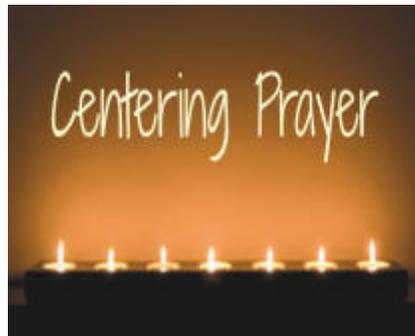
The harrowing story of the stoning of Stephen is an abrupt change from the joy and peace of Christmas day. St. Stephen's witness, however, is not one of fear and pain but of devotion to Christ. St. Stephen not only fulfills Jesus' words about persecution, he also dies like Jesus: he entrusts himself to God and forgives his persecutors. Is there someone you should forgive this Christmas season? *Today's Readings: Acts of the Apostles 6:8–10; 7:54–59; Psalm 31:3cd–4, 6 and 8ab, 16bc and 17; Matthew 10:17–22.*



# Mass Intentions December 19-26, 2020

Saturday	8:00am	Fr. Gordon	+Patrick Kennedy		
	4:00pm	Fr. Jim	The Murphy Family, living & deceased		
			+Rose & Charles Gigante		
Sunday	8:00am	Fr. Adrian	+Mary Jane Albritton	+Tom Ballard	
	10:00am	Fr. Jim	+Anthony Picozzi	+Rita Plankey Lemole	+Mike & Mary Banovich
	12noon	Fr. Gordon	+Mary Andranowski	+Joe Gaither	
Monday	8:00am	Fr. Jim	+Annabell Owen	Souls in Purgatory	
Tuesday	8:00am	Fr. Gordon	+Josephine Vignola	+Ashley Sams	
Wednesday	8:00am	Fr. Gordon	+Francis & Carol Pirog		
Thursday	8:00am	Fr. Jim	5:00pm Fr. Jim	St. Thomas More Parishioners, living & deceased	
	3:00pm	Fr. Gordon	5:15pm Fr. Gordon	St. Thomas More Parishioners, living & deceased	
	3:15pm	Fr. Jim	10:00pm Fr. Gordon	St. Thomas More Parishioners, living & deceased	
Friday	10:00am	Fr. Adrian	St. Thomas More Parishioners, living & deceased		
	12noon	Fr. Jim	St. Thomas More Parishioners, living & deceased		
Saturday	8:00am	Fr. Jim	+The Sambor Family		
	4:00pm	Fr. Gordon	+Mary Taff	+Ronald Deahna	
Sunday	8:00am	Fr. Jim	+Mary Jane Albritton	Fr. Jim Smko	
	10:00am	Fr. Gordon	+Gabriella Totti	+Al Nardi	
	12noon	Fr. Adrian	+Debbie Crosby	+Cindy DeCaria	+ denotes deceased person(s)

The Sanctuary Candle  
is lit in loving memory of  
Rita Plankey Lemole,  
on her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday.  
- Ed & Fran Plankey



During these challenging times, Centering Prayer is a way to draw closer to God. It is a Christian form of silent meditation that serves as a method of movement into contemplative

prayer, a way to open oneself to the Divine Presence and, through the healing of the Holy Spirit, to be of greater service to those around us.

And St. Thomas More's Centering Prayer Groups are now meeting weekly on Zoom! Thursdays from 10:30-11:30 am and 5:00-6:00 pm. If you are interested in joining the Thursday morning group please contact Noreen Delaney at npolidoro@comcast.net or 941-228-1799

For the Thursday evening group, please contact Bob Ferkenhoff at bferken@verizon.net or 941-350-6920.



We now can take credit cards for offertory, Mass intentions, Faith Formation registration, CFA and other donations.





This Advent, join us for a journey on The Road to Bethlehem, an opt-in digital discipleship program designed to guide you through this important season of preparation.

The Road to Bethlehem includes:

- daily Advent reflections by Dr. Tim Gray;
- weekly videos, audio talks, and book excerpts on FORMED related to the weekly theme;
- email reminders every morning;
- Brother Francis Advent reflections for kids; and
- a weekly action item to help you put the Advent message into practice.

**Not yet on FORMED?**  
Visit <http://signup.formed.org/>.  
Enter our parish's zip code or name.  
Enter your name and email.

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## Pray for the Sick

Our book of the sick is now located in the church near the Tabernacle. Please call the Parish Office if you would like to have an intention listed. We will add it for you.

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## Catholic Charities Christmas Appeal

The annual Catholic Charities Christmas Appeal is happening now through January. A donation to the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Catholic Charities Christmas Appeal will give those struggling the means to move beyond their battles and strengthen our communities during these times of high unemployment and despair.

During this season of sharing, please consider a contribution to Catholic Charities so we can continue to provide help, create hope, and serve all. Thank you for your giving spirit!

To donate, please visit [www.catholiccharitiesdov.org](http://www.catholiccharitiesdov.org) or mail a donation to Catholic Charities, Diocese of Venice, Inc., 5824 Bee Ridge Road PMB 409, Sarasota, FL 34233-5065.



Imagine how Mary felt at the birth of Jesus: excited, awed, frightened. Deep faith was her light in the darkness, for Jesus was born during the night of the year when darkness is the longest.

Your gift to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul brought light into the darkness surrounding the heart of those living in poverty bringing them the real, lasting, and deep joy of Christmas.

You may place your donation in designated kiosk in the Narthex, or mail it to the Parish Office. Please make checks payable to the St. Vincent de Paul Society.



## A Message from The Finance Committee

We are so thankful for everyone's ongoing support of St Thomas More. Our Parish community is well known for its generosity and care for others and we are grateful for that.

In the November 29<sup>th</sup> bulletin you read the Parish's annual statement of financial condition, which delineated the activities over the past church year. (July '19 – June '20). We make the following observations and requests:

1. We are in good shape, with a sound financial footing. With little debt on the balance sheet our future operational needs and capital projects should be manageable.
2. After making our goal last year, our Catholic Faith Appeal effort has been struggling, currently at about 62% of goal with a few weeks to go.
3. The regular weekly offertory collections have been stagnant or down for several years and we have had to rely upon occasional estate bequests or the sale of Parish assets to meet our regular parish expenses.
4. The Parish has reduced operating costs. Controllable expenses are down in every category on our operating statement including Personnel, as we have reduced staff due to our shortage of available funds.
5. Although we have no debt to speak of, we also have not been able to mount any significant reserves for future capital projects.
6. Our facilities are aging, and we will need to replace things like roofs and air conditioning systems in coming years. Although we do not have a timetable these things are unavoidable.

Given all these factors the time has come for us to ask all St Thomas More parishioners to come together and raise the amount we generate in the weekly offering.

We recognize that people have different situations and differing abilities to contribute to the regular offertory. It has been an exceedingly difficult year for some in our Parish and we are not insensitive to that fact. We simply want to highlight that our Parish team can continue to create an invigorating and inspirational environment only if we give them the resources to do so. Whether it is liturgy and sacraments, music, religious education, the food pantry, parish organizations or care for our homebound, the mission of the Parish requires resources.

In looking at the statement of activities, you will notice that the regular offertory collections were down over \$140,000 last year. Unfortunately, we did not receive bequests as in past years, therefore expense reductions were our tool to avoid a significant operating loss. We are facing a similar scenario with this year's budget, but we do not believe that we can reduce expenses again without impacting the operation of the Parish.

It has become clear that it is time to ask everyone in the Parish to assess what they are currently giving and think about the possibility of stepping up to the next level.

Our budget for the current church year, ending in June, projects that the Parish will lose \$75,000, before depreciation and that includes an optimistic stretch revenue target. Our goal is to raise the offertory at least \$2,500 per week (\$10,000 per month) to sustain the current scaled back operations. Could you consider a 10% -20% increase in your giving? And, if you have not been participating could you consider becoming a regular contributor at any level?

The offertory collection is the main funding vehicle for everything we do at St Thomas More. Please look for additional messages in the coming weeks about the utilization of the offertory dollars.

Thank you for considering an increase in your regular giving to the Parish. - *The Finance Committee*



# Prayers for Christmas

## *Prayer before opening gifts...*

Let us just for a moment, Lord, hold this time in our hearts.  
It is about mysteries and gratitude, unknowing and wrong sizes,  
snippets of ribbon and screams of delight.  
Help us to remember the immense love you have for each of us in this room.  
With each gift that is opened, no matter how perfect or not,  
let us feel again the many ways you gift us each day,  
especially with your presence in our hearts and the presence of each other in our lives. Amen.

## *Prayer before Christmas Dinner...*

God of all gifts, we thank you for the many ways you have blessed us this day.  
We are grateful each of those who are gathered around this table.  
We ask you to bless us and our food and to bless those we love who are not with us today.  
In our gratitude and love, we remember your humble birth into our lives and pray  
for those who are are without enough to eat.  
We remember the stable in which you were born and pray for those who have no place to live.  
We remember your challenging message of caring and giving and we pray for peace  
in families and nations throughout the world.  
We bless you and give you thanks in your Spirit  
who brings our hearts to life this Christmas Day and forever. Amen.

## *Prayer before the Nativity...*

It was St. Francis of Assisi who first popularized the Christmas manger.  
Wanting to see how Christ was born with his own eyes,  
he had a stable and some images made before Christmas  
and then invited his neighbors and friends to come and join him at his "Bethlehem."  
As we look on our manger, may the Christmas story unfold before our eyes, too.  
O God, whose mighty Son was born in Bethlehem those days long ago,  
lead us to that same poor place, where Mary laid her tiny Child.  
And as we look on in wonder and praise, make us welcome him in all new life,  
see him in the poor, and care for his handiwork the earth, the sky and the sea.  
O God, bless us again in your great love.  
We pray for this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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## 2020 Catholic Faith Appeal Goal: \$323,000

Pledged to-date	\$205,063.27
Received to-date	\$200,691.27 (63% of our goal)
Households	3,026 of which 13% participate

Your donation supports diocesan programs for:

- Homeless mothers and their children
- Catholic Charities
- Prison outreach
- Peace and justice initiatives
- Communications via TV and radio
- and more

## Institute for Catholic Studies and Formation

The Institute for Catholic Studies and Formation is offering a 16-week online course starting January 11 that introduces students to the principles, practices and sources of Catholic Theology. The course "What is Catholic Theology?"

Anyone interested in a graduate-level introduction to Catholic Theology is welcome to attend for a discounted price. The course is taught by Dr. John Gresham, Executive Director of the Institute, who brings 20 years of experience teaching at Franciscan University of Steubenville, Kenrick-Glennon Seminary in St. Louis, and Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit.

For information, or to register, visit the website of the Institute for Catholic Studies and Formation <https://institute-dov.org/> and click on the link to COURSES.

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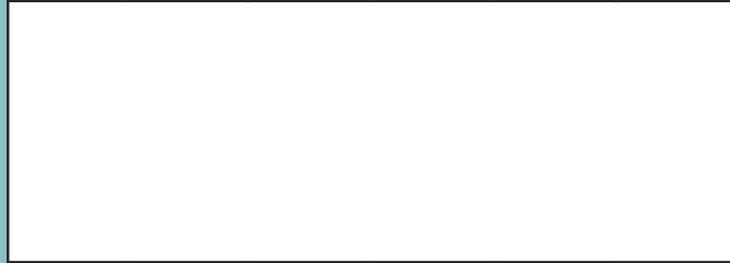
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