



FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

DEAR PARISH FAMILY

Merry Christmas! While the rest of the world has been immersed in Christmas for the past three months, for us as Catholics, Christmas starts on Christmas Eve and continues until the Baptism of the Lord on January 11th.

It is so wonderful to see so many people at church for Christmas. Welcome friends, one and all. Christmas is a time for family, and I welcome family members, visitors, guests, and everyone who joined us for our liturgical celebrations during the Christmas season.

I want to thank Tom and Sue and their army of helpers who did such a marvelous job decorating the church for Christmas. Thank you, too, to Leona, Betsy, Paul, Jeremy, and the choir of angels who make each Mass a heavenly encounter.

GRATITUDE AND THANKS

Thank you to everyone who helped with the preparations leading up to an awesome Christmas play by the school students. The teachers, Gabbie, Julie, Lou, and all the adults and children who put so much work into making this such a wonderful production to get us into the right mood for Christmas.

Thank you, also, to everyone who sent Christmas cards, greetings, and gifts. Your kindness and generosity are very much appreciated, and I hope to get Thank You cards out in the mail very soon!

MARY MOTHER OF GOD

Wednesday, December 31 is the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God. In 431 AD, at the Council of Ephesus, the Church declared that Mary was indeed the Mother of God, or *Theotokos*, in Greek. This day is a holy day of obligation. If you are unable to make the 5:00 pm Mass here at St. Elizabeth, there are Masses at other times in the surrounding parishes on that day and on January 1. Please check the bulletin for the schedule.

PARISH PHOTO DIRECTORY

Photography sessions for our parish directory will begin soon. Please do your best to keep your appointments. If you know of anybody who didn't get a phone call, or who hasn't been able to sign up for a session, please contact the parish office.

PLANS AND HOPES

You may have noticed the plans in the entries of the church. We're hoping to begin repairs and renovations on our front entrance area in the spring. Our hope is to not only repair the sidewalks, but also add handicapped parking and improved ramp access to the front entrance of the building. As with any project, your support is needed.

LENT AND EASTER

Lent begins in just over a month and a half. February 18 is Ash Wednesday, and the first Sunday of April will be Easter Sunday. During Lent there will be opportunities for

prayer and penance in addition to our usual daily Masses.

Although we just finished Advent and are in Christmas season we need to keep looking forward! *Tempus fugit*, "time flies!"

PRAYERS AND REMEMBRANCES

Please pray for Agnes Hart, who's funeral was this past month; and Felicia Marino who's funeral was in November. Please remember them in your prayers, and please pray for the consolation of their families and loved ones as they mourn.

SCHOOL AND FAITH FORMATION

Although we're on Christmas break right now from school, classes will resume on January 5 for both St. Elizabeth School as well as Faith Formation. That's still a week away, and I'm sure we all hope it's a long week.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK

The last week of January is Catholic Schools Week. We appreciate your prayers and support for our parish school. I can tell you, having served in four parishes with Catholic schools that we truly have a gem here at St. Elizabeth. Thank you to the school staff, teachers, and army of volunteers who work so tirelessly to ensure our students have the best education we can provide.

PLEASE PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Your prayers are the lifeblood of our community. God bless you, *Fr. David*



THE HISTORY OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Many legends and old traditions concerning the Christmas tree date back to very ancient times, but historical documentation of its origins as the tree we know and decorate today only appeared in recent centuries.

There is no doubt, however, that legends and traditions show the convergence of many customs, some born outside the Christian culture and others strictly Christian.

Since very ancient times even primitive people would take evergreen plants and flowers into their huts, seeing in them a religious significance. This belief was found especially among the inhabitants of the northern regions with cold climates and long, dark winters. It was almost as if these plants revived thoughts of the coming spring.

The most important clue to the origin of the Christmas tree as we know it comes from the mystery and miracle plays, and in particular from the Tree of Good and Evil in the earthly Paradise.

These plays were first performed in the late Middle Ages and their purpose was to teach religion. It should be remembered that people in general were illiterate. To spread and to keep the faith alive, to make known the Sacred Scriptures, preaching was essential.

It was thought that acting out Bible and Gospel episodes would facilitate this task. As a rule, these religious plays were enacted for the celebration of a particular feast day or a saint's day, and they became popular throughout Europe. A famous play was the performance put on for Our Lord's Nativity on Christmas, celebrated on 25 December.

On Christmas Eve, 24 December, Adam and Eve would be commemorated with the highly popular story of the Tree of Knowledge in the earthly Paradise; they would appear on the stage together with the devil, disguised as a serpent, Eve picking an apple and Adam eating it. Original sin was symbolized on the night of 24 December.

Perhaps the tree should have been an apple tree, but since an apple tree would have been inappropriate in winter, a fir tree was set on the stage and some apples put on its branches or, to symbolize the future coming of Redemption, wafers prepared with crushed biscuits in special moulds that were symbols of the Eucharistic presence of Jesus, as well as sweets and gifts for children.

Even when the religious plays were abandoned, the Tree of Paradise continued to be associated with Christmas in many people's minds.

One of the earliest testimonies of the Christmas tree are in the town of Schlettstadt in 1521, in which special protection was prescribed for forests on the days prior to Christmas. Forest rangers were responsible for punishing anyone who illegally cut down a tree to decorate their home.

Another document informs us that in Strasbourg fir trees were sold in the market, to be taken home and decorated.

The tradition of the Christmas tree spread across Germany and the whole of northern Europe, and soon arrived in North America.

Pope Paul VI began the tradition of setting up a massive Christmas tree beside the nativity scene in St Peter's Square, a gift each year from a different nation.

All this endows the Christmas tree with religious and Christian significance as we commemorate the humble birth of our Savior.

