

December 7, 2014

A blessed Advent to all,

When darkness comes early and many of us long for light and warmth from the sun, twinkling displays of multi-colored Christmas lights spring from houses, tree branches, storefronts and street lamps, illuminating neighborhoods and towns in expectation of the returning light. It is as though the very desire for sunlight and warmth prompts many of us to invest time and resources into evoking these very qualities at the darkest time of year. The tiny lights offering color and warmth to the night can remind all of us there is a quiet joy and a palpable peace waiting to be discovered in the relative quiet of winter. We are invited to rest in the deep interior spaces of our lives and to allow the embryonic forms of new life to take shape below consciousness and recognition, outside the realm of ego's drive to take over the controls.

I like to think of Advent as a season closely aligned with the eighth month of pregnancy. There is a deep connection with interior mysteries unfolding out of sight and beyond understanding that are nevertheless profoundly physical and life changing. It is a season of waiting. There is anticipation and hope mixed with a certain degree of anxiety surrounding preparations for an unknown future. There is tenderness and joy as well as an intensified yearning for security and peace. The travails of birth loom on the horizon and life, as we knew it, is coming to an end. There is darkness and an aching desire to move beyond it into the light of a new and unburdened day. We wait, while the need for patience steadily grows, and life carries us forward to that breath-taking moment of face-to-face contact with Mystery Itself in a form we must nurture if it is to survive.

The Church places John the Baptist at the center of its Advent call to "prepare the way of the Lord" encouraging us to rid ourselves of interior obstacles that stand in the way of open hearted receptivity to the birth of Christ in our lives and our world. What if, instead of a wild-man on the banks of the river Jordan heralding the coming Messiah, the central image of Advent was Mary, a soon-to-be mother pregnant with new life? The waters of birth and the waters of baptism are now closely aligned. The call to let go of old, outdated and destructive patterns so that we can be fully present and attentive to the fragile new life God is entrusting into our hands now makes even more sense. "Make yourself ready," Mary might say, "because giving birth will demand your last ounce of strength and try your ability to walk through darkness with courage. Use these remaining weeks to prepare yourself for God's intruding presence. Create a place in your heart and in your life for the Divine to make its home at the center of your being. Get ready to protect and nurture this life in all its vulnerability everywhere you find it. Cultivate hope, tenderness and sensitivity as well as resilience and courage as you mediate the connection between wide-eyed innocence and the harsh edges of a blind and darkened world. Develop watchfulness and attentiveness to the powerless and the weak for these will always be my children and your children. As my heart aches with love for each of you, you must learn to foster love and light in all the darkest places. As a mother you will be called to 'make straight the path' that leads to peace, to joy. Again and again you will embrace the darkness with a 'yes' and give birth to the 'Light of the World'."

Readings for Liturgies can be found on the USCCB website at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/>.

Mass Schedule This Month

Mass in **Portland** will be Saturday, **December 13**, at **Northminster Presbyterian Church, 2823 N. Rosa Parks Way** at **5:00pm**. Potluck follows. Please bring your favorite holiday entreés, vegetable dishes, salads and desserts. Choir rehearsal begins at 4:00 and all interested singers and musicians are invited to come and participate.

Mass in **Eugene** will be Sunday, **December 14**, at **First Congregational Church, UCC, 1050 E. 23rd**, at **4:00pm**. A potluck follows Mass. Please bring your favorite holiday dish to share at the potluck afterwards: entreés, veggies, salads, and desserts. If you are interested in being part of the choir as a musician or singer, please come at 3:00 for rehearsal.

Christmas Eve Mass in **Eugene**, will be Wednesday, December 24, at 9:00pm. This will be our 4th annual Christmas Eve celebration at the home of Dianne and Amanda. The address and directions are posted in the member portal of the Sophia Christi website. You may also request directions from Toni by responding to this email or by calling 503-286-3584. All are invited and welcome!

Masses in **Battle Ground** will be Sunday **December 7 and 28** at **10:30am**. Bring non-perishable food and hygiene items for St. Vincent de Paul as well as healthy food to share after Mass.

Upcoming Events:

Winter Events:

❖ **Parish Council Meeting, January 18, 2015, Ike Box Coffee Shop, 299 Cottage St. NE, Salem, 2-4pm**

Please notice the next meeting of the Parish Council will take place early in the new year. If you have ideas or suggestions, or would like to be more involved in planning or implementing Sophia Christi activities, please consider coming to Salem in January. We carpool from Battle Ground, Portland and Eugene, and you are always welcome to ride along!

Pastoral Update:

A Message from the Parish Council

Each month a member of the Parish Council is asked to write a short piece for the newsletter. This month we feature the comments of Mary Goody, who represents Battle Ground:

I am Mary Goody, from Cougar, WA. Cougar is located on the non-blown out side of Mt. St. Helen's and the eastern end of Yale Lake in Cowlitz County. My husband and I moved here from the Jackson Hole, Wyoming area early in 2007. I am a member of Sophia Christi and particularly the Battle Ground, WA contingent. We meet twice

monthly (first and fourth Sundays at 10:30 am) at the house church of Helen Umphrey just outside of Battle Ground near Lewisville Park. I have been attending for nearly two years. Some of us attend a wonderful book club at the house church in which we are able to discuss writings, philosophy and thoughts concerning our beliefs and views on our religion. I was raised in northern Minnesota, on the Iron Range, as a Catholic, in an Italian family. I have been a licensed private investigator in Washington and Oregon for many years, primarily working on defense-related life history, and sentencing issues in death penalty cases. My husband is a trial attorney who also works on death penalty cases as a defense lawyer.

I have known Helen Umphrey for over 24 years, first meeting her when she organized my youngest son's first communion class. She has been an inspiration to me on many levels and a good friend. Helen took me to my first Sophia Christi Mass. It was really exciting for me to attend the Portland Mass and hear the beautiful and meaningful sermon Toni gave. I am now a member of the Parish Council and feel privileged to be a part of this fledgling group. I am certain that as one progresses through the journey that brings us to Sophia Christi that it is not easy to speak to others who are not familiar with this movement. I have learned, however, that to do so, as the proper moment presents itself, is a freeing and cleansing experience for me.

From the Battle Ground House Church of Sophia Christi, we wish each and every one of you a joyous and peaceful holiday season!

Website

If you have taken photos at Sophia Christi events in the past and would like to share them with the community a fine way to do this is through the 'member portal.' You can either send them to me via an email attachment (if they are in digital format) or bring the photos to Mass so they can be scanned and returned to you. We are in the process of collecting new images for various sections of the website and would love your input and ideas. As always, we are careful to insure privacy for community members who do not want their pictures posted for the world to see. The non-public 'member portal' provides space for in-house sharing of sensitive information as well as for ongoing enjoyment of Sophia Christi's history through the creation of a photo archive. If you are interested in helping with this creative project please let me know. Just a reminder: our web address is www.sophiachristi.org.

A pastoral reminder--if you or someone you know has a pastoral need that isn't being met, please don't hesitate to give me a call. You have my email address in this mailing, and my office phone number is 503-286-3584. Feel free to use either one. You can contact me anytime for conversation, home visitation, reconciliation or anointing, home Masses, weddings, funerals, memorial services or other pastoral care needs.

Food for the St. Andrew Episcopal Food Pantry

There are changes occurring at the St. Andrew Food Pantry and we do not yet know whether it will continue in operation beyond the beginning of 2015. The Pantry will, however, be open through the holidays, so we will collect food and personal hygiene items at Masses this month as usual. I will update you as decisions become known, so watch for more information in the January newsletter. **Look for the basket at the**

entrance to the sanctuary when you come for Liturgy on Saturday or Sunday, and please be as generous as possible.

I remember a time when life moved much more slowly, when telephones were not connected to any kind of messaging device and there were no expectations that ordinary people would be available and responsive to phone calls, let alone messages, every hour and minute of every day. There was less pressure to 'do' and more permission to 'be,' to watch and observe, to sit and reflect on life and its meaning. Society itself was not as 'driven' as it has come to be. Human beings were 'people' not mere 'consumers' whose spending habits determined the fate of an economy. It was socially acceptable to have and to claim a 'soul', to be something more than a wallet within the social fabric of a nation. It is time, as Christian people following a counter-cultural mother and Divine child, to reclaim our souls.

As we move through this Advent season of pregnancy and waiting I challenge myself—and invite you—to make time to ponder the richness of a sacramental world displaying contrasts of darkness and light. This world into which Christ is ever born anew through the 'yesses' we utter into the mysteriously pregnant night skies is a world worth saving, according to Scripture, a world to be tended with the fierce gentleness of a mother's love.

Tending the fragile aspects of a wintery world requires awareness. It requires a willingness to be present, to notice, and to freely respond with interest and care. Life is tenuous and delicate. The newborn infant in our Christmas nativity scene is an icon of that fragility. The image evokes our protective instincts, going to the heart of what it means to be a people with 'soul,' with depth, with hearts connected by threads of love to everyone and everything in God's good creation. The Light of the World resides in the pregnant darkness of our interior lives, ready to be brought forth as a light for the nations. It is the role of the mother within us all to bring forth this light, to give birth to the tender and helpless new life that can, with our devoted attention and nurturing, one day bring peace to the world.

May we all cultivate the spirit of Mary, waiting with expectancy and hope, ready to open our hearts, bodies and minds in a labor of love giving birth to the Light.

Blessings of Advent,

Toni