

December 5, 2021

Advent greetings,

We entered Advent last Sunday and embarked on a new liturgical year. We are given a fresh lens on our theology and on the world as we move from the Gospel of Mark to that of Luke who includes more women in his telling of ‘the good news’ than any other evangelist. As we move through the year, however, the lectionary of Sunday readings fails to include most of these women. Even the story of Mary Magdalene, disconsolate before the empty tomb and first to encounter the risen Christ, is left out of the Easter Sunday Gospel which stops when Peter and John, following Mary’s discovery of the empty tomb, run to see for themselves that the body is not there. This same patriarchal mindset foregrounds John the Baptist during Advent when the Gospel read at both the second and third Sundays of Advent, every year, focuses our attention on John the Baptist who, at the time, is at least 30 years old. Only on the fourth Sunday, the one just before Christmas, do we meet Mary without whom there would be no Jesus and no Christmas.

Why so much emphasis on wild-man John when Advent is more correctly Mary’s season, her ninth month of pregnancy. Who is ‘preparing the way of the Lord’ more intentionally, in a more life-altering way this season, than this young teenager whose ‘Yes’ made all of Christendom possible? This is not to say that adult John’s passionate invitation to change our hearts isn’t an important message, but it is most fitting for the season of Lent. Instead, according to the *Universal Norms On the Liturgical Year and the Calendar* published following the approval of the new Roman Calendar by Pope Paul VI in 1969, “Advent is a period of devout and expectant delight.” Devout and expectant delight! It seems this phrase would characterize the figure of Mary much more than the Baptizer as she prepares for the birth of her child, one foretold by an angel and recognized by his unborn cousin John while both were still in utero. Where is Mary’s ‘Magnificat’ this season? Is it not as powerful, even more so, than John’s responses to the tax collectors and soldiers in the Gospel reading slated for next Sunday?

The focus on John underscores a male-centered theology that is teetering on the edge of a cliff and ready to fall into the dustbin of history. Because, really, where is the ‘un-wed’ teenage mother, displaced from home by an oppressive regime, near-term in her pregnancy, forced to make a dangerous journey as the result of an unjust and unfeeling political system? How is this not what needs proclaiming from pulpits as children are separated from parents at borders, parents whose only crime is the attempt to bring them to safety? Why are we not focusing on mothers giving birth in ditches as they flee violence under terrorizing rulers and systems? Where is Mary’s powerful prayer—her Magnificat—in our Advent liturgy, spoken after Elizabeth underscores her courage exclaiming: “Blessed is she who believed that what our God said to her would be accomplished!” The words we need to hear and take to heart this season, words that never appear in the Sunday lectionary are these: “My soul proclaims your greatness, O God...you have scattered the proud in their conceit; you have deposed the mighty from their thrones and raised the lowly to high places. You have filled the hungry with good things, while you have sent the rich away empty.” These words highlight God’s intention for the world as Mary’s pregnancy progresses. The ‘lowly’ are favored; Mary is the template. This young woman who has no ‘power’, who has yet to be seen in her rightful place as

harbinger of deep change, symbolized by a humble but resounding 'yes' to God's design for humanity, this woman is the person to follow this season. It is our time to say 'yes' to birthing something new and tender in our lives, and the life of the world.

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

### **Online Mass Schedule Continues This Month**

**Mass via Zoom** will be Saturday, **December 11**, at **5:00pm**. Our Masses are online every 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday-of-the-month..

**Christmas Eve via Zoom** will be Friday, **December 24**, at **5:00pm**.

### **Upcoming Events:**

#### **Zoom Invitations for December Liturgy**

If you have regularly participated in Sophia Christi liturgies either in Eugene or Portland during the past year or have recently requested a Zoom invitation to our online Masses, you will automatically receive a Zoom invitation this month for our liturgy on the 11<sup>th</sup> as well as for the Christmas Eve liturgy. Invitations will be sent Friday, December 10, and Thursday, December 23. If you have not been involved in the past but would like to participate in the online liturgies, let Toni know by responding to this email no later than Wednesday, December 8.

#### **No Sophia Christi Zoom Get Together in December**

Since the fourth Saturday this month falls on Christmas Day, our Christmas Eve liturgy will gather the community in place of the monthly social gathering. We will allow plenty of time following both Masses this month for people to share life experiences, seasonal insights, blessings of the year and hopes for the year ahead.

### **Pastoral Update:**

#### **Pope Francis' Global Synod on Synodality Invites Our Input**

*As many of you may be aware, a Synod on Synodality began in Oct. This begins a two-year process of exploring what Pope Francis is calling "journeying together." Though there may be some skepticism about the effectiveness of this approach and any consequences coming as a result of listening to the voices of the Catholic faithful, members of Sophia Christi certainly have something to contribute to this conversation! Kathleen Glover and Rachel Wheeler are discerning steps to gather Sophia Christi community members via Zoom in February 2022 with more information about crafting a statement about our experiences of and hopes for the Catholic church. Though the formal process involves our local archdiocese, we want also to share our work with the Vatican via other(WOC) Synod Toolkit:*

- *Recall experiences in your local church where you felt supported, seen, and valued,*
- *Recall experiences that brought pain or exclusion, and what it means to bear those wounds,*
- *Recall ways you feel the Spirit calling you and calling the church, and*
- *Recall your worries or concerns about the path ahead of the church, if it continues as it has.*

*--Kathleen Glover, Council Member and Rachel Wheeler, Council Secretary*

### **November 20 Council Meeting Summary**

*The Parish Council met on November 20 via Zoom for its annual meeting of Budget & Priorities Setting for the new year. An important item of business was the review and approval of the 2022 budget created by Treasurer Jessica Katon; among other items approved in the proposed budget, the Council discussed and then voted on an increase to Toni's monthly stipend in the new year. We also continued our discussion about when and how to resume in-person Masses; these discussions will continue into the new year as we continue to discern the best ways to gather as community. The Council also agreed to facilitate ways to contribute to the Synodality process initiated by Pope Francis earlier this fall; stay tuned for more information about how to be involved! --Rachel Wheeler, Parish Council Secretary*

### **Zoom Liturgy Recordings**

One advantage of Online Liturgies is that we have the option of recording them. If you are interested in receiving the recording this month please let Toni know. The recording is available within a day or two following Mass. Send her an email if you are interested.

### **Staying Connected – Zoom Gatherings and Facebook Options**

In addition to our monthly Masses and social gatherings over Zoom, we also have the Sophia Christi Facebook page. You can join the page and check for postings about online courses and other offerings, as well as post information you would like to share. FB also provides the option of hosting a private group discussion in one of its meet-up rooms. If anyone would like more information about this resource, or if you are interested in facilitating a discussion with other Sophia Christi members please contact Anna Lankutis [lankutisa@gmail.com](mailto:lankutisa@gmail.com), or Rachel Wheeler [rastonwinchel@hotmail.com](mailto:rastonwinchel@hotmail.com).

### **Care Team**

If you are interested in being a part of the Care Team or you have a need that the Care Team might respond to, please contact Kathleen Glover [gloverconnection@yahoo.com](mailto:gloverconnection@yahoo.com) or Pastor Toni.

### **Council Member Reflection**

*On the wall next to my altar at home I have a framed illustration of Jesus that I found at a local St. Vinnie's a couple of years ago. He's standing tall, staff in hand and cradling a small lamb in one arm while surrounded by a flock of trusting sheep. I paid \$1.50 for the picture, but to me it's a priceless treasure because it's a comforting image of Christ as my loving Good Shepherd. A shepherd is responsible for the care of their flock. But a special shepherd will watch for signals from each sheep should the pasture they've been led to fail to provide adequate sustenance. The shepherd will then guide the flock to a different, more nourishing field, putting the needs of those in his or her care ahead of their own.*

*Our earthly shepherd, Pope Francis, has created an opportunity for each of us to provide feedback on the state of our spiritual pasture by initiating a synod, and I invite each of you to consider participating in the process. As members of Sophia Christi we have a unique and important perspective that the church would greatly benefit from hearing. --Josie Miranda, Sophia Christi Councilmember.*

### **Member's Corner – Sharing Reflections**

This space in the newsletter is available for sharing our stories, insights and experiences. Consider sending a short paragraph of your own for inclusion in next month's edition. Deadline is December 3<sup>rd</sup> for the December newsletter.

### **Website**

Outreach has always been part of the mission of Sophia Christi and our website is an important aspect of that mission. The web address is [www.sophiachristi.org](http://www.sophiachristi.org)

**A continuing pastoral invitation**—In the normal course of life I have the opportunity to meet with you personally when a pastoral issue arises, or you want/need spiritual support. But we are somewhere outside the range of ‘normal’ now. Please let me know if I can assist you in this strange time we are living through. I am still available by phone (503-286-3584) and you can still reach me through this email address. Feel free to use either one.

How did we get here with male-exclusive prophets and Gospel stories that situate us in the story of a rustic, solitary ‘wild man’ living on locusts and berries, when the true Advent story is about pregnancy, about women supporting each other as they prepare to bring new life into the world, while the world itself is in chaos? Populations are on the move, forced by circumstances to relocate regardless of babes in wombs and mothers in their final months of pregnancy, and there is no room at the inn. It is a story replete with images that mirror our own historical moment with challenges most of our prelates seem unwilling to face. It is the story of women, those judged as worthless for not bearing life, and those too young to be expected to bear life. It is the story of courage as women face the dangers of childbirth, often alone and frightened, too often unsupported and even vilified in their pregnancies. And it is the story of hope that every infant, made in the image and likeness of the Divine, brings something new and wondrous to the world even as malicious powers view these children as either ‘exposable’ or ‘exploitable.’ Women know what it takes to bring new life into the world, to nurture and sustain it until it can stand on its own. Elizabeth knew. Mary knew. And the angel who delivered God’s invitation to Mary knew nothing could happen without Mary’s ‘yes’ to all the joy and suffering her ‘yes’ would bring.

The story of Advent is ‘waiting in silence’ while cells develop unseen, ‘waiting in hope’ for new life, God’s own progeny, to finally make its way into the world. The waiting is a courageous and hopeful act. It is a valiant ‘yes’ to life, a humble ‘yes’ to faith in the God who walks with us and who is taking form within us in the depths of our being and largely without our awareness. It is a stubborn ‘yes’ to bearing the changes our bodies and minds must make to prepare us for what the road ahead will require as we move forward on this journey of co-creating God’s reign on earth. Much is asked of us, as Mary’s story suggests. The challenges of physical life are real. When John the Baptist tells those who came to him to be baptized “to produce good fruit as a sign of their changed hearts”, they asked him what they should do. He told them to share their food and clothing with those who had none. He told the soldiers not to bully or falsely accuse anyone. He told tax collectors not to charge people more than what they owe. It is Mary’s prayer rendered in concrete terms, that the ‘proud’ who hold power over others will be “scattered” and lose their authority and influence, and that the “mighty” will be ousted from their thrones, and justice and mercy reign in their stead. As we hear and pray Mary’s prayer we say ‘yes’ to what is asked of us in the Spirit-led effort to bring about peace through embracing the demands of our role as Christ-bearers. We pray to be strong enough, courageous enough, to say ‘yes’ to all of it, and follow Mary’s lead.

May joy, hope, love and peace be yours this season, and in your Christmas celebrations ahead,

Toni

