

## ♪♪ Grace Notes from the System Chaplain ♪♪

December 2018

It seems impossible that we have completed the cycle of the Church Year and are now started into a new one. December is a time of new beginnings and, actually, the First Sunday in Advent was once recognised as the beginning of the new year.

At this time of year I am particularly thankful to be a Christian and to be able to find hope and focus beyond the commercial emphasis on spending money and the saturation of seasonal songs on the radio and in the mall. I have discovered that at some point I need to recognise a separation between Christmas and “Santamas”; otherwise, I become rather grinch-ish about the absence of Christ from much of the celebration.



It helps to remember also, that Santa Claus (Dutch - Sinterklaas) as we see him today is a 19<sup>th</sup> century figure drawn from the saintly Bishop Nicholas, known to many children as Father Christmas. Nicholas was the 4<sup>th</sup> Century bishop of Myra in Lycia and is credited with many acts of kindness and miracles involving children. Even Odin, the Norse God with his long white beard and tradition of bringing gifts to children in midwinter, may have been syncretised into the personality we know today.



To continue with the theme of Christ, Our Light, begun in the October **Grace Notes**: our ancestors in faith knew what they were doing when they developed Advent as a season of hope. In pagan tradition December was the month when there was seen to be a need to entice the sun, which was observed to be



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shrinking and disappearing, to come back – and we still have some traditions which are echoes from this past. Did you know that the round shortbread cookies with the notched edges were originally made that way to look like the sun? The shortbread was made in a much larger cake and broken into four farls or smaller wedges to share and eat. It was eaten on the winter solstice and, in some places, these sun-shaped cakes were tossed into the sea as an offering to the sun. The “O Antiphon”<sup>1</sup> for December 21<sup>st</sup> is “O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, **sun of justice**: come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.” That suggests to me a very good and faith-filled reason to enjoy shortbread cookies on December 21<sup>st</sup>!

As I have been spending some time with “Renewing the Promise”, it occurred to me that Advent is our annual opportunity to “renew the promise” with God. As we revisit our longing for the coming of the Kingdom and the Messiah each year, we are invited to re-examine and renew our

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<sup>1</sup> The Roman Church has been singing the “O” Antiphons since at least the eighth century. They are the antiphons that accompany the Magnificat canticle of Evening Prayer from December 17-23. They are a magnificent theology that uses ancient biblical imagery drawn from the messianic hopes of the Old Testament to proclaim the coming Christ as the fulfillment not only of Old Testament hopes, but present ones as well. Their repeated use of the imperative “Come!” embodies the longing of all for the Divine Messiah. (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)

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own relationship with God. We remember that God loves us so much that, in the desire to be closer to us, God took on the form of a helpless infant to dwell among us, ultimately giving us the greatest gift of all in dying for us on the cross. Without Easter, without the Passion, Death and Resurrection, Christmas is virtually meaningless and simply a sentimental romanticising. Although the creche with the figure of the infant Jesus takes a very central place in our celebration, in remembering the birth of Jesus we are also tying it to the words of the Memorial Acclamation we say at Mass, "...Christ will come again." Thus, Christmas gives us yet another opportunity to recognise the Lord in our midst and to open our hearts to God.

With the new calendar year, we have many Adult Faith Formation activities to offer:

Thursday, January 17, 2019- AM: Candace Ray from The Lighthouse for Grieving Children will speak on supporting grieving children in our schools and classrooms

Thursday, January 17, 2019 – PM: Michael Way-Skinner from the York CDSB will talk on Equity and the Body of Christ

Thursday, February 7, 2019: Bryan DeSousa, Vice-Principal at Christ the King, will explore the faith journey of working with students who have special needs

Thursday, February 21, 2019: Norm Roberts, Vice-Principal at Bishop Reding, will help us to discover the richness of the Liturgy of the Hours as a prayer form for our schools

Thursday, March 28, 2019 Mary Ellen Chown and Joanne Montague will explore the biblical image of ourselves as "earthen vessels" who can pour out God's love in our Catholic schools

Please register on StaffNet Event Registration for these events.

As this week winds down in our schools, may we remember our call and renew our promise to see the face of Christ in all less fortunate than we. May our giving this Christmas include the poor, lonely, grieving, discouraged and abandoned and let us bring some light into their lives. I know that our schools are making Christmas much brighter for many because of the generosity of kind and spirit which they share at this time of year.

Wishing you and everyone dear to you every blessing for Christmas and the coming year,

Peace,

*Gillian*

**System Chaplain and Faith Formation Lead**

