

St. Stephen Catholic Church

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Fourth Sunday

OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 23, 2018

*Mary set out and traveled to the hill country
 in haste to a town of Judah,
 where she entered the house of
 Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.*

Luke 1:39-40

Week At A Glance	Schedule of Masses
Monday, 12/24 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carols & Prayers, 4:30 pm • Christmas Eve Mass, 5:00 pm Tuesday, 12/25 - Merry Christmas! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christmas Day Mass, 9:30 am Wednesday, 12/26 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parish Office Open, 11:00 am - 3:00 pm • Feast of St. Stephen, Prayer Service 5:30 followed by potluck Thursday, 12/27 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parish Office Open, 11:00 am - 3:00 pm 	Mon - Fri: 7:30 am <i>Chapel, Room 1</i> Saturday: 5 pm Sunday: 9:30 am Confessions: Saturday, 4:30 pm
	Upcoming Mass Intentions
	Sat 12/22 5 pm - Angelo Rusca † Mon 12/24 7:30 am - Dorothy Holmes † Thurs 12/27 7:30 am - Charles Cody † Fri 12/28 7:30 am - Charles Brady † Sat 12/29 5 pm - Br. Dominic Berardelli † Sun 12/30 9:30 am - Anne DeFilippo †

Ministers Schedule:	Christmas Eve / Day		Dec. 29-30	
Mass	Mon. 5 pm	Tues. 9:30 am	Sat. 5 pm	Sun. 9:30 am
LECTOR	M. Milani	R. Gigoux	S. Derby	R. Minister
C.L.O.W.				T. Nguyen
EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF THE EUCHARIST	J. Jury* P. Walton D. Minister	E. Hites* M. Mammola P. Dempsey	D. Derby* S. Kuca M. Milani	J. Patel* M. Lenahan Veamatahau
ALTAR SERVERS	Takafua/Takafua	E. Schichnes	F. McCormick	L. Morin
SACRISTAN	M. Ah Yee	J. Jury		M. Ah Yee
COUNTERS: Dec. 26	M. Lenahan, D. Mammola, W. Lang, P. Walton			

Dear Friends,

With Christmas day taking place early in the week, the fourth week of Advent, like last year, is cut short. You may recall how last year Christmas Eve took place on the night of the 4th Sunday of Advent. This year, it is on Monday. And so, this letter will serve both as a wrap-up to Advent, and an introduction to Christmas.



By the time we see each other again next Sunday, Christmas may be a distant memory for us. But let me assure you, that much like the Easter season, the Christmas season continues long after the Holiday itself is over. It continues until Sunday, January 13th, when we will celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. In fact, the Church wishes us to celebrate the amazing event of Christ's birth with so much rejoicing that the eight days after December 25th are to be celebrated as if they were Christmas Day itself. This is what is known in the Church as an Octave, which culminates with another very special Solemnity on January 1: Mary, the Mother of God.

Looking ahead to all this celebrating that awaits us, we might say that the fact that Advent is cut short comes as a relief. With an event as wonderful as Christmas approaching - with all the subsequent Feast Days - we want to wait as little time as possible for it to arrive. And yet, we must not get ahead of ourselves, for the quality of our celebration of Christmas correlates to the quality of our Advent preparation. Now, this does not mean that more time in Advent will promise a better Christmas. Perhaps you truly have spent these last 22 days preparing well. Perhaps you put in some extra minutes in prayer, or maybe you reached out to someone in need, or even went to one of the Reconciliation services. Maybe you are truly ready to celebrate the Christmas season. But maybe this Advent season, like many in the past, flew by, and you find yourself standing on the cusp of Christmas wondering, "Where did the time go?" I know I have felt that. This season has been a great blessing to me in assisting at all the Reconciliation services - at CTK and at other parishes - but, as I write this, I need to be careful not to let Confession become a tiresome, routine burden. I need to continue to be vigilant in prayer. With all the rushing around, maybe you feel burned out, or spiritually or emotionally tired and dry, before Christmas even begins.

If this is the case, take heart. You still have today and tomorrow to prepare. You still have some time to go off by yourself - even if only for a few minutes - to be with God and to ask Him to prepare your heart for the Christmas season. This can be as simple as kneeling by your bed and saying something as ordinary as "God, help me." With all the added responsibilities during this time, help me with Your grace to be available to where You send me. Another simple prayer is "Thank you, God." During this season of gift giving, we remember the gift You made of yourself to us. Help us to make of ourselves a gift back to You.

We see here something quite significant. Advent may be ending, but the spirit of Advent and Christmas must continue throughout the year. On December 26th, when the stores take down their Christmas decorations and begin putting up ones for Valentine's Day, we mustn't forget that Christ is with us, because He loves us, and that He continually comes to us in those unexpected ways. And so, we celebrate Christmas with great rejoicing because Christ came to us, and we stay alert and watchful for the times He will come again. On behalf of Fr. Paulson, Fr. Timoney, and all the staff at Christ the King, have a blessed end of Advent, and a very Merry Christmas!

With love, Fr. Mario

Fourth Sunday of Advent December 23, 2018

First Reading: Micah 5:1-4

The prophet Micah, writing some 700 years before Christ, attacked the social injustices of Israel. He looked ahead to a day when the tiny city of Bethlehem, where David had been born, would bring forth a new shepherd, a good shepherd, who would unify the people and bring peace.

Second Reading: Hebrews 10:5-10

The Letter to the Hebrews constantly looks to the Old Testament and shows how Jesus surpassed its laws and sacrifices. In Old Testament times the people offered animal sacrifices over and over in atonement for their sins. But this could not compare to the God-made-flesh who gave his life *once* for the sins of all.

PARISH STAFF CONTACTS

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Christmas Mass Schedule:

Christmas Eve: 4:30 pm Carols & Prayers; 5:00 pm Mass
Christmas Day: 9:30 am Mass



Scripture Study led by Jeannette Holmes starts up again on Wednesday, January 2 at 9:30 am in Room 5 with a study on Revelation. All are welcome to attend.

New Year's Eve Retreat: Divine Encounters Embracing the Spirit of God, with Fr. Landry. Monday, Dec. 31 from 7:00 pm - 10:30 pm. Reflection, Eucharist and Festive Dessert. Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose. RSVP to 510-933-6360.

This **Christmas season**, St. Stephen is collaborating with Hillcrest Congregational Church to collect **donations for the homeless** here in our area. We will be accepting donations of socks, knit caps and scarves, gloves and new or gently used men's jackets. A donation box is located in the back of the church.

Christmas Day Grief Support, December 25th, 12:30 - 2:00 pm. Christmas Day is a painful day for those who have lost loved ones through death or divorce. Join us for a supportive time on Christmas Day in the library at Mullen Commons, St. John Vianney. It will be a healing time, empowering you to return home and have Christmas dinner with your family, to honor your loved ones. Call Eileen at 939-8149 for more information.

Our **Children's Christmas Play** is scheduled for December 24 at the Christmas Vigil Mass at 5:00pm. The final rehearsal is Thursday evening, December 20 at 6:00pm. For more information, contact Annette Roux.

Mark your calendars and join us for the **Feast of Saint Stephen** on Wednesday, Dec. 26 at 5:30 pm in the parish hall. The evening will start with a prayer service followed by a potluck dinner and caroling. Use this as an opportunity to share your Christmas leftovers.

Living Nativity -

Seasonal choral music and refreshments. A camel, llama, donkey, and cow, plus alpacas, sheep, goats, piglets and more! Monday, Christmas Eve, 4:30 - 7:30 pm, 11 White House Ct, Walnut Creek. **All are welcome to this free, drop-in event** celebrating this holy night. Parking is available. Please avoid side streets as a courtesy to our neighbors.



Because of the holidays, the **early deadline for our January 6 bulletin** is December 27! Please send any bulletin updates to Chris Lang before that date.

Remember to pick up your 2019 envelope boxes from the back of the Church. If you cannot find your box or would like to start using envelopes, please talk to Chris Lang.



Next weekend, the final weekend of 2018, we have a **2nd collection for our Saint Vincent de Paul 5th Sunday Collection**. Thank you for your generosity.

When the world was dark and the city was quiet, you came. You crept in beside us. And no one knew. Only the few who dared to believe that God might do something different. Will you do the same this Christmas, Lord? Will you come into the darkness of today's world; not the friendly darkness as when sleep rescues us from tiredness, but the fearful darkness, in which people have stopped believing that war will end or that peace will come? Will you come into that darkness and do something different to save your people from despair? Will you come into the darkness of today's world? Not the friendly quietness when friends hold hands, but the fearful silence when the phone has not rung, the letter has not come, the friendly voice no longer speaks, the doctor's face says it all? Will you come into that darkness and do something different, to embrace your people? And will you come into the dark corners and the quiet places of our lives? We ask this not because the fullness of our lives depend upon us being as open and vulnerable to you as you were to us, when you came, wearing no more than swaddling clothes and trusting human hands to hold their maker. Will you come into our lives if we open then to you and do something different? When the world was dark and the city was quiet, you came. You crept in beside us. Do the same this Christmas, Lord. Do the same this Christmas.



Annette Roux,
Pastoral Associate, Ret.

